

**2024 State of the City
Akron Mayor Shammias Malik
Wed. April 10, 6-8pm
Akron Civic Theatre**

Good evening, Akron! It's an honor to be with you tonight as we mark the first 100 days of my time in office and as we reflect on the state of our city. As many of you know, today is also my birthday, which is a fun coincidence. We were trying to figure out how many pallets of sheet cake from Acme it would take to feed everyone, but we decided not to go in that direction. Today is also the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan – Eid al-Fitr. Eid is a celebration with good food, friends, and family.

During the campaign I spoke a great deal about my family – especially my mother, Helen Killory Qammar. I can't begin tonight without mentioning her and my brother Najjam. And I also want to take a moment and thank Alice Duey, for bringing happiness and joy to my life each and every day.

So how about that national anthem from Akron's own firefighter Andrew Fuller, pledge of allegiance by Christian Nurse, from the I Promise school, and those performers! I first met the Black Beanz a year ago at Summit Artspace – and I have been amazed by the talents that Chomba, Kamana, Martin, Yoshua, Samweli, Mmunga, and Malanga have. Like all of our young people, they give me hope for the future. Thank you!

I also want to thank our partners at the Akron Roundtable as well as the wonderful folks here at the Akron Civic Theatre for supporting tonight's event. Thank you so much.

I also want to thank the nearly 2,000 city employees who make our city government function day in and day out. If you are a City of Akron employee, could you please stand or wave a hand and be recognized?

And we're honored to have many elected officials in the room with us including our colleagues with Akron City Council. Could our councilmembers please stand or wave a hand so we can recognize you this evening? And if you could remain standing, I'd like to ask all other elected officials in the room to stand. Thank you all so much for being here tonight. I'd particularly like to thank Mayor Andy Ginther who drove up from Columbus to be with us tonight, as well as Keary McCarthy from the Ohio Mayor's Alliance.

I'd also like to thank County Executive Ilene Shapiro and her staff. The relationship between Mayor and County Executive is critical to moving our community forward, and I am grateful for Executive Shapiro's willingness to share her advice and experience with me as I start this new role.

As you entered the Civic tonight, you saw we had set up a little photo station where we asked you to take pictures and write down why you are excited for Akron. I just want to share a few of those thoughts with you this evening and then we'll be sharing some of the photos on our social pages as well. Someone said they were excited for Akron to become the polymer city. Someone else mentioned they're excited for new focus on sustainability. I think a lot of city staff said they're excited because the Eclipse is finally behind us. I think that just means we can start planning for the year 2044.

These are all great answers. But my answer, the reason I'm most excited for Akron is all of you and the energy for change that we're building together. Tonight, I want to focus on that change, because when I think about the State of our city, I think about a state of change. I think about a city on the verge of big things, about positive momentum and forward movement. To put it plainly, I think the State of our City is changing for the better.

It's one thing to talk about change – I spent over a year doing that all across town on the campaign trail – but it is another thing to

see it come to life in the actions of our administration. Each day, as I enter city hall, I am more and more hopeful about this city.

Change is not easy. It is messy and stressful. It can be scary. We don't need change for the sake of change, we need real, lasting, responsible, thoughtful change. We need new ways to address violence. We need to make people feel seen and heard when they reach out to the city about an issue, no matter how big or small. We need a permanent commitment to dismantling systemic racism and ensuring everyone has real opportunity. We need to make our city government achieve its purpose – to make people's lives easier.

At the swearing in ceremony at E.J. Thomas Hall, Carla Davis so beautifully sang A Change is Gonna Come. Akron – tonight, I am proud to say that change is HERE!

That's right. Change is here!

It's happening right now. And it is a journey we are all on together.

Today is just one early milestone in this journey. During my campaign, I shared with you a positive, hopeful vision for Akron – what we called Together For Akron. Safer Together – with safety as the first priority. Learning Together – supporting quality education. Living Together – prioritizing health, housing, and the environment. And Working Together, focused on economic development and job opportunities in our neighborhoods and downtown. I said all these things are possible by making city hall more strategic, by being more engaged with our residents and partner organizations across the community, and by being more open and transparent – willing to listen and accept criticism.

We took that Together for Akron vision and crafted an ambitious agenda. We worked tirelessly during the transition so that on Day One we could hit the ground running and have a clear set of priorities to get started on. And we've been working on that vision every day since.

So what have we done?

We listed out 73 action items on our 100 Day Tracker, and then we put it online for all of you to see. As of today, we have completed 55 of them and 18 of them remain in progress. We will continue to hold ourselves accountable and report back to the community on our goals and progress.

In our first 100 days, I said we would prioritize communications and public engagement. During that time, we've shared a weekly email newsletter, conducted regular live-streamed press conferences, engaged with our residents through various social media platforms, initiated regular discussions with business leaders, faith leaders, and more. We held a town hall on the police chief search at Garfield CLC and a town hall on the budget at Firestone. We've got two town halls coming up at Buchtel – we're going to show off all these great school buildings. And tonight, I'm pleased to say not only do we have our wonderful ASL Interpreters here, but we are also having this speech simultaneously interpreted live into Nepali and Spanish. We feel it's important to provide these kinds of accessibility options so that everyone is included has an opportunity to participate.

In looking back at my schedule, I attended 109 community events in my first 100 days. These events included a couple basketball games, several ward meetings, a celebration at Joy Park for centenarians who have reached age 100, and more. My commitment to you is that you will continue to see me out in the community. I believe in order to lead a city, you have to be present.

And I don't really have a choice. I have 200,000 bosses and folks want to know what we're up to. If we're not communicating proactively, I'm going to have to do more explaining in the checkout line at Mustard Seed, at our many coffee shops, at the gas station, and everywhere else. But seriously, this is your city

government. Our commitment to transparency, communication, and engagement will continue every single day.

City government is a team sport, and we have been focused on building that team within city hall. The transition gave us a chance to take a hard look at our organizational chart and figure out what makes sense. We've eliminated some roles, moved other roles, and created some new roles. I know this has created some concern, but I truly believe we are developing a city government that is more open, more responsive, more collaborative, and more strategic. In negotiating our budget with City Council, we agreed to wait on funding a Public Engagement strategist role, a Data Transparency role, and an Environmental Policy role but I am committed to these functions as a core of city government, and I look forward to proving how these functions can save us time, save us money, get you information quicker, and ultimately make your lives easier.

And I am very proud of the two exceptional leaders who make up our core leadership team – Brittany Grimes Zaehring, our Chief of Staff, and Nanette Pitt, our Chief of Strategy. In creating these two roles, we are working to make sure that our city can handle complex, day to day operations, while also having dedicated staff capacity to work on longer-term, community-wide initiatives. I'm also energized by our cabinet and appointed staff – I'm thankful to folks who served in the previous administration who were willing to stay, I'm thankful to the new faces who have taken a chance on me, and I'm proud each day watching folks become a team.

As I mentioned before, it's a 2000-person team in city government. Over the last 100 days, I've met with staff from every city department and listened to their perspectives – what would help them do their jobs. Just yesterday I held a citywide employee webinar with our HR Director Montrella Jackson to answer questions directly from employees on everything from remote work to hiring processes to my first pitch at the Rubberducks

game and more. And I look forward to continuing to meet with every office across city government in the coming days.

I've been elected to a new role, but I've worked in City Hall since 2016, and I know that each role in city government is just as critical to Akron's success as my role. It's easy to say that, but you're also going to see me live it out, support our City employees and provide them with training, support, feedback, and resources. This will always be a work in progress to better support and uplift our employees but I think we've made a great start.

For the first time in the city's history, we held an event for our employees to help celebrate Black History Month this year. We had food, music, spoken word, speakers, and more for our event held at the Ocasek building. I was a little concerned, you know the Ocasek building is our municipal courthouse now, and we had music bumping and line dancing. I was a little worried, but when I saw Judge Williams line dancing, I felt better about it. But seriously – I heard from so many employees after this event how much they appreciated this small gesture of support and community. So we did it again for Women's History Month. And we'll keep bringing our team together to build community and friendship and support. And I'm excited to be real partners with our Akron Municipal Court – our judges, court staff, probation, and everyone who makes our third branch of government function. We've also launched a new Volunteer Time Off program to help support our employees as they give back and get more involved with the City of Akron. Our Human Resources Department recently launched a new set of training opportunities for all of our employees. These trainings focus on workplace and career development skills and will help our folks on their career journeys. I believe investing in employees as people first is crucial to supporting our workforce.

And on that note, I'm happy to announce that by this fall, for the first time ever at the City of Akron, we are going to be launching employee resource groups for our city employees. We will start

with groups for empowering female employees, BIPOC employees and LGBTQ+ employees and all of their allies. These will be employee-led with support from my administration. And we'll expand these as time goes on. These groups have proven to help with engagement, retention, and workforce development. When employees feel they can bring their full, authentic selves to the workplace each day and be celebrated for who they are, they are more productive, more engaged, and more likely to stay. I'm excited to see how these groups benefit our team.

Another focus of change for the first 100 days has been modernizing our city operations. Now, everywhere I go, I feel like I hear folks talking about our new Akron 311 app. It goes against a big rule of politics, but I have to give credit to someone else – because Mayor Horrigan and his team started the development of the app. Since launching the app in mid-January, we've had close to 4,000 downloads and we've processed roughly 1,300 service requests directly from the app. It may not seem like much, but this is a big step in making our city services more accessible. If you've not downloaded it yet, feel free to pull out your phone and download it now, just search Akron 3-1-1.

Another big step forward is our Snowplow Tracker. As a retired ward councilman, I know that when snow falls, folks want to know when they're going to see a plow on their street. This new dashboard provides real-time information about the city's snow and ice operations as they are happening. Now, you can look at it as lucky or unlucky, but since we launched the tracker, we really haven't needed to use it. But it will be there for future seasons, and I think it's going to be a big hit. I want to give our IT department, led by Darren Rozenek, and our Service Department, led by Chris Ludle, a huge hand for the snow plow tracker and the 311 app – they made this happen.

Every year, the city passes a capital budget and operating budget. As the saying goes, budgets are moral documents, that help show the vision we are putting in place. This year, we passed a Capital

Budget for city infrastructure and major projects – investing in updated community centers at Patterson and Reservoir Park, a new pool at Reservoir Park, a huge investment in city sidewalks, concrete streets, permanent speed tables, and more. We also decided to refocus our resurfacing so that going into next year, we won't have any carryover, and residents can expect that the 2024 roads will be done in 2024, and same for 2025 and future years. We did this all while budgeting the lowest amount of new general obligation debt in six years, prioritizing fiscal responsibility.

And last month, we passed an Operating Budget, detailing \$815 million in investments in our city. The focus was on safety – with the highest amount of APD officers in 20 years and the highest number of firefighters and medics in 30 years. This isn't to throw people at problems, it's to acknowledge that proactive work like community policing, violence intervention, and community engagement requires having enough staff capacity for departments that have been stretched thin for too long. Too often APD has to send patrol officers from call to call to call leaving them little time to build relationships with our residents. It's also an acknowledgement that our AFD and APD staff see difficult things, and we need them to take care of themselves and not get burned out.

I want to take a moment and thank our City Council. The budget process wasn't my favorite part of the last 100 days – I spent so much time working to get elected, I wanted to make sure we got the resources we need to get things done. I want our core team to have the capacity to get stuff done, and to figure out how best to support each city department.

While we may not agree on everything, I will always seek to work with City Council – I truly believe we can accomplish wonderful things for our city together. Each of the 13 leaders on Council bring their ideas to the table about how to make our City stronger and at the end of the day, we're all on the same team.

I'm also proud of the engagement we did during the budget process, in addition to our regular budget hearings in council, we did a Facebook livestream with myself and our Finance Director Steve Fricker as well as an in-person town hall. And next year, we are going to do more. It's my commitment to the residents of Akron that next year's budget will incorporate participatory budgeting for a portion of our expenditures. At the end of the day, this money primarily comes from our taxpayers here in Akron and you should have a say in how it gets spent. We'll have more to announce on that as the year goes on.

Building the team, modernizing city operations, and passing a budget are all critical to running a city. But as I started, I mentioned our Together For Akron vision. There's a lot to talk about here. Starting with our number one priority – public safety. This is one I could easily spend all evening on. Safety is the number one concern of our residents, and it will always be my top priority. We've begun to address public safety in a wide variety of ways.

First, working in partnership with Summit County ADM Board, we've launched a co-responder pilot program called SCOUT – the Summit County Outreach Team – with a mental health responder from Portage Path Behavioral Health responding alongside Akron Police and Akron Fire to certain 911 calls where its safe and effective to do so. This is quickly becoming a best-practice program across the country. I've pushed for it since 2021 – it can create better outcomes for residents and free up officer time to focus on community policing and violence prevention. And it's working. In the first month alone, the SCOUT team has taken 85 calls for service and has safely transported 16 patients for further treatment. Dozens of hardworking folks have worked to make this a reality, and I'm looking forward to seeing this partnership grow in the months and years ahead.

We've also sworn in a new class of Akron firefighters to help address staffing needs for Akron Fire and EMS run issues we experienced when AMR left the city and we've launched the next

cadet class for Akron Police which is one of the most diverse classes of cadets we've ever had in the history of our department. We're excited to have many folks from Akron Fire and Akron Police here with us tonight. If you are a member of either, could you please stand and be recognized? Thank you for your service to the residents of Akron.

On the campaign trail, I talked about how for years, the Harold K. Stubbs Justice Center where we house our Akron Police Department has deteriorated, and we've needed a permanent decision on the future of the police station. I gave myself a deadline - six months in office. The city has previously explored the option of rehabbing the existing building and over the last few months, we've solicited proposals for either renovating another building, or new construction. I'm proud to say that as of last week, when the deadline closed, we have received proposals for eight different sites along with a number of city-proposed sites. As a next step, we are going to work with an architectural firm to determine our best option and what we can afford – because we cannot prioritize public safety if we continue to let the current building deteriorate. By the end of June, we will have a final decision on the future of the police station.

One big step we've taken in the first few months is continuing to improve the way we tackle gun violence. I've spent time meeting with our federal and state partners – our ATF Director in Washington, our state Safety Director in Columbus, the US Marshals, the US Attorney – and several of us traveled to Cincinnati to see their crime gun intelligence center at work. Our gun violence reduction team is continuing to expand their work, and we are going to get better and better in connecting the dots to hold people accountable who are involved with gun violence.

But we cannot solve the problems of gun violence only through policing. So tonight, I am announcing a new program focused on community violence intervention. This summer, we will launch a “Street Team” pilot program . This program will hire and train

Credible Messengers – people who are able to speak directly with those who are most likely to be most involved in violence, especially our young people, because they have lived experience, a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. These Credible Messengers will be lifelines in our neighborhoods they will help our kids see a brighter future. They will help our youth understand the consequence of their actions, while providing them with support and options that allow them to develop goals and take steps to reach them. These kinds of programs have been proven to be effective around the country, and it's time we bring these interventions to Akron.

We will also pursue other efforts – continuing our funding of violence prevention efforts and mentorship opportunities, pursuing hospital-linked intervention programs with our healthcare partners, faith-based initiatives, and more.

We've also conducted a police chief search process with your input. We shared a survey and we got 1,541 community responses and 182 Akron Police Department responses. Here's what we learned those surveys.

Residents want the police department to focus on crime reduction and prevention and they would like officers to have the opportunity to have more positive daily interactions with the community.

Residents want the city to increase diversity in the department, particularly racial diversity, hiring officers that reflect and represent the diverse communities in Akron.

Residents want the department to treat all members of the community equally.

Survey respondents called on the city to select a new Police Chief who is committed to positive changes and will hold the department accountable; selecting someone who has a track

record of community engagement and who knows the community.

From within the department, the responses also reflected a yearning for more positive and affirming interactions and relationship with the community and a desire for leadership that will encourage and support officers, lead by example, and build trust with the community. Officers are proud of the training they receive, but would like to see better equipment.

As you know, this process has been difficult. We started the process last fall and sought to cast a broad net – external and internal candidates, supervisors of every rank – based on the city’s past practice.

In January, our Law Department came to me and shared their opinion and the opinion of outside counsel – that under our city charter I did not have the authority to cast as wide a net as I wanted and that I couldn’t include external candidates or candidates of lower rank within the department. I have a lot of respect for the internal candidates, but this came as unwelcome and frustrating news, because I wanted to cast the broadest net possible and the city has hired externally before – but the more we dug into it, we couldn’t find fault with the legal reasoning. This has been the hardest thing I’ve dealt with in my time so far as Mayor – folks I respect and look up to have asked me to pause the process until we can pass a charter amendment and change it.

And many of the concerns about this search are rooted in another reality – the clear lack of diversity in upper ranks of our Akron Police Department, our Akron Fire Department, and many city departments. Let me be plain. I am committed to making real, meaningful progress, as quickly as possible, in ensuring every kind of diversity, and especially racial diversity in leadership across the city.

But I also want to recognize that the hard work of changing systems cannot be done in just 100 days. I have spent a lot of time reflecting on this, and continue to, and I owe you my best judgment. I really believe that in order to undertake systemic change, we need a permanent Police Chief, who can lead the department, implement a vision, and make decisions in a way that an acting leader simply cannot.

A permanent chief helps us prioritize public safety for our city by establishing a vision and pushing forward policy changes, leading our department towards real community policing. A permanent chief is in a much better place than an acting chief to help with this year's union negotiations, which will be critical to securing change for years to come.

Having an acting chief for a period of time is understandable. Having an acting chief for over a year will delay and make everything else we want to accomplish more difficult. Real system-wide change takes much longer than the 100 days I've served so far, but it has to start now. I remain as committed as ever to the promises I've made about leading change here in Akron.

This month, we will be holding two community town halls at Buchtel CLC so everyone can have an opportunity to meet both candidates for Chief and ask them the questions that matter most to them. So again, we are doing this together.

And I am committed to bringing a charter amendment to be placed before voters in November, that will broaden our candidate pool for police and fire leadership in future searches. In the coming weeks we will announce the members of a committee to lead the drafting of that amendment, and I have invited the Black Elected Officials of Summit County to participate as part of that committee.

Our community has taken significant steps in recent years to strengthen accountability and transparency within the Akron Police Department – recognizing that bridging trust gaps is critical, particularly in how our police interact with our Black community. That’s why I pushed for Issue 10 – so that the oversight board and the auditor’s office can be a bridge between police and the community.

Over the past year, the Board has worked to get up and running. Today, we are glad to welcome Anthony Finnell as the City’s Independent Police Auditor. Mr. Finnell, my administration will always seek to work collaboratively and constructively with your office. I’d ask Mr. Finnell and the Board Members present to stand and be recognized for their service.

Thank you. On a much more somber note, 10 days ago, we had an officer-involved shooting here in Akron on Brittain Road. We are thankful that the teenager who was shot was not more seriously injured, and that the officer is ok. My administration went beyond the requirements of our city charter in releasing body camera footage, by releasing the entire interaction between the teenager and the officer to show our community the entire context. We also released the officer’s personnel file. We anticipate being able to share more information in the coming weeks. For incidents like this, you may not hear me say much at first – I have an obligation to let the process play out and to let the Attorney General’s Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the internal investigators, and auditor do their jobs. Again, I will share all that I can, as I am able to in a timely and transparent way.

But I want everyone to know – avoiding tragedies is of the utmost urgency to me. Shortly before I started this job, retiring Chief Steve Mylett let me know that APD has been reviewing the department’s vehicle pursuit policy. Over the last few months, there has been a lot of internal discussion. Tonight, I am announcing an updated Chief’s order related to vehicle pursuit which will go into effect tomorrow morning at 7am. Under the

updated order, which will become a permanent policy change by the end of the month, our department will no longer conduct vehicle chases for equipment violations alone such as a broken side mirror or taillight. Officers will retain the discretion to chase for traffic violations. This is a commonsense change that will eliminate some unnecessary chases. In the coming months, we will be reviewing and revising other policies, including around chemical spray and crowd control. As we do this work, we will do it transparently, with opportunity for public comment.

My take-away from Issue 10 is that we have to keep working on this, facing the issues together, allowing for the nuance and grey areas; so we can grasp and keep hold of our common humanity; so we can find solutions that allow our officers to do the work we need them to do while ensuring all our residents are treated with dignity and respect.

As I was on the campaign trail last year, I was constantly asking Akron residents what concerns them most. Just behind public safety, was a desire for more opportunities for our young people and an educational environment that truly helps our students thrive. Knowing how important this is, I made it a priority for my administration to get more involved with Akron's youth and with our biggest educational partner for children, Akron Public Schools.

That priority has taken shape in our first 100 days in a number of ways. First, we've hired Richelle Wardell as the city's Education and Health Strategist and we're lucky to have Denico Buckley-Knight, continuing his work as our Youth Opportunity Strategist.

I think sometimes when folks hear the word "strategist" they immediately envision a think tank environment where people are paid to sit around all day and come up with grand ideas. That is in no way the type of strategy team I've created. Richelle, Denico, and the rest of the team have been out in the community, building partnerships, talking about actionable solutions to the

problems facing our city. In many cases, we are well aware of what those solutions are but we've lacked the capacity to truly tackle these issues head on. We don't have an education department but now we have someone at the city waking up each day focused on education and health.

We will continue building our partnership with Akron Public Schools, and especially working to build out access to the Community Learning Centers, which amazing assets in our neighborhoods.

We are also strengthening our relationships with other education institutions – the University of Akron has to be the engine of Akron's future economic growth, and we will continue working with them and Stark State, and Kent State University. I want to thank our educational leaders here tonight for their continued collaboration.

One of the most important initiatives my administration will tackle is universal pre-K. As a community, we were beginning to tackle this before COVID. But now we are recommitting ourselves to this work, and while it won't happen overnight, we will work with all pre-K providers in our community to achieve our goal – that every family in Akron quality, affordable early learning, setting a foundation for lifelong learning and prosperity.

I want to also thank our APS Superintendent, Dr. Michael Robinson, who is leading the way, with a shift from half day to full-day pre-kindergarten. We will continue to support your efforts.

In education and other issues, so much of this work is done in partnership with community organizations – and I want to thank our philanthropic partners, including the Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, Knight Foundation, and United Way Summit Medina, as well as many others in this space, for their efforts.

And I want to dive into one of those partnerships in depth tonight. The city doesn't control what happens in the classrooms, or what happens at home, but one place we play a big role, and can play an even bigger role, is our youth extracurricular, or out of school time. That's where Youth Success Summit comes in. The program will officially launch in July but is already making a huge impact in Akron. Youth Success Summit (YSS) is a backbone organization for out-of-school time providers, empowering providers to deliver high-quality programs that meet the evolving needs of our youth.

YSS's mentoring collaborative is already operational, and their team is hard at work under the guidance of Executive Director Rachel Tecca and Founding Consultant Ellen McWilliams-Woods with the support of Denico and Richelle from the city and many other partners and stakeholders within the community.

We, as a city, have made a significant commitment to create and equip YSS. Taking this proactive role as the strategic partner in the overall operations of this organization, we will not only invest in the future of our youth but also lay the groundwork for a stronger and more resilient community.

Youth Success Summit will serve as a hub for connecting families to quality afterschool and summer activities, including work-based learning opportunities.

Establishing YSS marks a significant milestone in our community's collective commitment to nurturing the potential of every young person in our city. But perhaps most importantly, Youth Success Summit represents a powerful call for collaboration and partnership. By bringing together Out-of-School-Time providers, community leaders, educators, and families, we are not only amplifying our impact but also forging a stronger, more interconnected network of support for our youth.

Our efforts at collaboration don't stop with our youth. When it comes to Working Together and Economic Development, Akron's future is bright. My mom taught chemical engineering at the University of Akron, and her office was right next to the glittering Polymer Science building. I've been waiting for 33 years for polymers to happen. And folks – thanks to the efforts of dozens of companies and the Greater Akron Chamber and the leadership of Steve Millard, we are this close. Right now, we are competing for \$40 million in state funding, and \$70 million in federal funding to take our industry to the next level and for the Rubber City to become the Polymer City. I've made that pitch at the US Department of Commerce in DC and we will continue to lobby for this exciting opportunity.

Fiber internet is also part of the economy of the future, and we have announced that the City of Akron is partnering with SiFi networks to create citywide fiber access, a \$200 million private investment where the city's main contribution will be simply processing utility permits faster. We will also continue exploring a partnership with Summit County around Summit Connects, a countywide fiber ring.

We're also going to tackle the future of the Innerbelt – a historic scar on our city, but also an opportunity for a new beginning. The construction of the Akron Innerbelt destroyed homes, businesses, and community that took decades to build. Now, we are working hand in hand with that same community to determine what's next for the area they once called 'home.' This process is about doing things with our residents and not to our residents. The \$1 million Reconnecting Communities grant from the federal government is helping us with this process. I'm excited to announce that tomorrow, we are taking the next step in Reimagining the Akron Innerbelt by issuing a request for qualifications to identify a planning firm to help determine the plan for the decommissioned part of the Innerbelt. I look forward to what's to come for this historic area.

Across the country, folks are worried about the future of downtowns. Tonight, we are announcing that this summer, we are going to create a new Downtown Community Development Corporation, drawing on the success of our neighborhood CDCs, because in reality, downtown is a neighborhood too. We need someone who wakes up everyday thinking about downtown real estate and attracting businesses, jobs, and residents to right here on Main Street. But that work can't only be funded by the public sector. So I am going to be asking our corporate community to help lead this CDC and help build the future of downtown.

From my time as a ward councilman, I also know the importance of our neighborhoods. Each neighborhood has different needs and in each neighborhood, we are working with partner organizations, like our Community Development Corporations, the Summit County Land Bank, and others, to support our small businesses, remove blighted buildings, and grow community. From Kenmore to North Hill to Firestone Park to Summit Lake and on and on, our neighborhoods each need different kinds of support. And our Planning Department under Kyle Julien and our Economic Development department under Suzie Graham Moore, will be working together through Integrated Development, helping to bring that support to life.

Another piece of our Together for Akron vision is what I've called Living Together – prioritizing health, housing, and the environment.

When it comes to environmental sustainability, right now, all around the world, we are faced with the reality that every community must take steps to prevent climate change and move to a clean energy future, or else there isn't going to be much of a planet left for future generations.

Here in Akron, we've made some progress over the years, but often tackling environmental issues is looked at as a luxury, something we can't really prioritize. But the reality is that

preserving and restoring the health of our environment is critical, and the rest of the world is moving urgently towards a more sustainable future. We can either lead on that and be part of the solution or get left behind by the green economy of the future. We've got amazing natural resources with our park systems, our waterways, our tree canopy, but they're not going to last forever if we don't have policies that value them in development conversations. And all across Akron, but especially in East Akron, there are properties and neighborhoods still facing injustices of our past. Injustices we have to clean-up and ensure we don't repeat. On Bettie Street, in Middlebury, residents have spent more than 25 years organizing against the waste transfer station that sits about 50 feet from their homes. Our commitment to sustainability isn't only about mitigating climate change or making environmental progress. It's about doing the right thing by all of our residents and simultaneously working toward more equitable outcomes.

In our first 100 days, we've made significant progress on this work. Casey Shevlin has joined our Cabinet as the City of Akron's first ever Director of Sustainability and Resiliency. We've begun engaging the community about their ideas and hopes for a sustainable Akron. We were glad to participate in the Environmental Justice Coalition's community forum, and I know Casey has continued conversations with many of the individuals and organizations that attended that event along with us. She looks forward to continued engagement on a range of sustainability topics as her Office takes shape.

Akron has joined a statewide coalition, Power a Clean Future Ohio, as the 50th participating community, and the last of our major cities to join. As folks know, I'm pretty competitive, and we've got some catching up to do. Power a Clean Future Ohio will provide us with free tools to create and implement carbon reduction plans that are measurable and economical.

We also announced we were chosen as 1 of 25 cities nationwide to join Bloomberg American Sustainable Cities. As part of this program, Bloomberg Philanthropies will fund an innovation team over three years, and these staff will be chosen from the local talent pool to help us tackle projects at the intersection of environmental sustainability and racial inequality.

These are great first steps for the significant work ahead and I look forward to more milestones to come.

And while we focus on our environment, we have to put equal emphasis and energy on our housing. So we're improving how we enforce our housing code, to make sure everyone is living in humane conditions. In the last few weeks, our housing inspectors have moved from pen and paper to using tablets for their inspections. This is something I've advocated for years, and it will allow our awesome staff to conduct more inspections every year in a more efficient way.

Another issue I've worked on for years is Right to Counsel, which would help ensure that folks facing eviction in the City of Akron will have legal representation, which is the right thing to do, and it can also save millions for taxpayers. Up in Cleveland, right to counsel staff have helped negotiate move-outs and assist with settlements, keeping people out of homelessness. For the past two years, City Council and the previous administration have helped identify American Rescue Plan Act funding or ARPA for Right to Counsel. Today, we're working closely with United Way of Summit/ Medina and Community Legal Aid and we are closer than ever to bringing this needed support to our residents. I want to recognize and thank United Way CEO Jim Mullen and Legal Aid Executive Director Steve McGarrity for their continued partnership.

Throughout our city, there are residents who need help with their siding, or roof, or ADA accessibility, or more. The city's Home Repair Program, set up with ARPA funding, was intended to

provide some much-needed help, but it's been slow to get off the ground. Over the last few months, our team has been working to review the program and get it on the right footing internally to show results for our residents. We'll have more to share on this very soon.

In the first week of my administration, I stopped by the overnight emergency homeless shelter run by the Peter Maurin Center, Summit County Continuum of Care, and Community Support Services. They had about 70 people on mattresses throughout the building, which was much higher than they had expected. I sat with folks and listened to their stories, how they ended up in this difficult position. The reality is that homelessness is growing across the country, and here in Akron. My administration is committed to finding new solutions – taking ideas that have worked elsewhere, and finding more support for the amazing folks doing the work here in Akron. In this year's budget, we've allocated \$1 million in ARPA funds beyond our typical annual funding, to support those new solutions. On this issue, like many of them, I am not the expert, and so we are going to empower our city staff like Long Range Planning Manager Helen Tomic and Deputy Service Director Eufancia Lash with a goal of treating every resident with dignity and respect.

As you can see, we've done a lot in the past few months and it's certainly not all about me. As I keep saying, it's a team effort to enact the vision we've laid out for the future of our city and this is a team I'm incredibly proud to lead. Tonight, I want to take just a moment and highlight some of our city employees who have really done some astounding things in the first 100 days. In the first two months of the year, two Akron Police employees really went above and beyond in the course of their every day work to not only make an impact but save lives. Detective Larry Rhodaback performed CPR on an unconscious child until she was able to breathe again, saving her life and similarly, Officer Adam Semchee located a kidnapped little boy and comforted him until he could be returned to his family. Tonight, I'm honored to have

Det. Rhodaback and Officer Semchee here with us. Could you please stand and be recognized for your incredible efforts? Thank you.

Another individual I am proud to recognize this evening is recently retired Akron Fire Chief Joseph Natko. And today just so happens to also be Chief Natko's birthday! So happy birthday, Chief! Chief Natko is one of the most dedicated public servants I've had the pleasure of meeting. During the transition, we identified a need around emergency management, for preparedness for things like the Eclipse and other emergencies. I'm really thrilled that Chief Natko agreed to stay on as our city's first ever Assistant to the Mayor for Emergency Management. Knowing that Joe is still working diligently protecting the citizens of Akron is a blessing to our administration and to our residents. Chief Natko could you please stand so we can show our appreciation for your dedication.

The last story I have starts with Deputy Service Director Eufancia Lash. He and his came to me and said that the Word Church building, formerly the Akron Baptist Temple, was a huge safety concern that was at the top of the list of buildings that need to be addressed. From January to March, city staff across departments met every Thursday – from Fire and Police and Service to Finance and Law and more – planning to secure and demolish this historic structure, which was actually seven enormous buildings. Our local homelessness support organizations, including the Continuum of Care, Community Support Services, and the Homeless Charity, were there providing support along the way. One of our newest staff members, Policy and Grants Strategist Emma Lieberth Osborn, and a longtime city employee, Sean Vollman, worked with the Ohio Department of Development and the Summit County Land Bank to identify \$700,000 in funds to defray our costs. And on March 19th, Akron Police and Fire crews walked through the building, securing it, and the demolition began.

The demolition of the Word Church building is the story of what city government can be at its best – a way of addressing

longstanding neighborhood concerns, creating a new future on abandoned land, getting things done, making people's lives easier. I had a ton of pride watching it happen. And I know we're just getting started.

From that experience and the entire 100 days, we've taken lessons that will help guide us in the weeks, months, and years to come. Number one, listening matters. Number two, communication and engagement must be central to all we do. Number three, we can't do it alone.

And that's where you come in. I've said all along that my vision for change was meant to be broader than just me, or just city government, but something that everyone could be a part of. We have a city full of people who give back, and as our administration moves forward, we're going to be sharing more ways in which we can leverage the energy for change that's in this room and in this city.

Tonight, we have just one ask of you. With your program, you should have received a palm card for Youth Success Summit's Mentoring Collaborative. If you scan the QR code, it will take you to a page with lots of different mentoring opportunities. Mentoring is a key activity that my administration will lift up, because it can provide such a benefit to young people in our community, helping them to see what's possible for their futures, but also because it's a learning and growing experience for mentors as well. Please check out the QR code and consider signing up with one of these programs – it will make a big difference in our community and I assure you, it can make a big difference in your life as well.

The transition is behind us – the first 100 days is now officially done as well. As I look ahead, my promise to all of you, to our community, is that I will always take the responsibility of this office incredibly seriously.

I will stay true to the vision for change I have shared with you many times.

I will let you know how things are going –

I will celebrate our successes with you and I will acknowledge our setbacks and struggles.

I said at the outset tonight that the reason I'm most excited for Akron is all of you and the energy for change that we're building together.

Akron is a place where we can all be part of making the change we want to see.

Akron is a place where change is possible!

And Akron is a place where change is happening! Thank you!