

## **MAYOR TOM HENRY'S 2024 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

THANK YOU, LARRY, FOR THAT WARM INTRODUCTION.

I APPRECIATE YOUR MANY YEARS OF MEANINGFUL SERVICE IN OUR COMMUNITY.

YOU'VE MADE A LASTING DIFFERENCE.

FAMILY, FRIENDS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, SPECIAL GUESTS, RESIDENTS OF FORT WAYNE, WELCOME.

I'M HUMBLLED TO STAND BEFORE YOU AS YOUR MAYOR FOR ANOTHER TERM.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT.

TRULY, IT'S A GREAT TIME TO BE IN THE CITY OF FORT WAYNE AS WE CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE UNPRECEDENTED MOMENTUM AND INVESTMENTS.

FORT WAYNE IS LEADING THE WAY AS EVERY SEGMENT OF OUR COMMUNITY IS GROWING AND THRIVING.

IN TODAY'S GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, CITIES COMPETE AGAINST ONE ANOTHER TO BRING IN NEW BUSINESSES, GROW EXISTING COMPANIES, AND PROVIDE UNIQUE QUALITY OF LIFE AMENITIES TO ATTRACT INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES.

SOME TIME AGO, WE CAME TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY TO SAY WE MUST BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES TO MAKE FORT WAYNE A POINT OF DESTINATION.

WE'VE DONE JUST THAT AND MORE.

COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE TURNED THE CORNER HAVE MADE THEIR DOWNTOWNS THE CENTERPIECE OF ACTIVITY.

OUR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN HAS HIT THE MARK.

FOR EXAMPLE, RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT IS ONE OF OUR NEWEST SHINING STARS BRINGING RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE TO ENJOY RECREATION, SHOPPING, DINING, EMPLOYMENT, AND MORE.

WE'VE COMPLETED PHASE 2-A CONNECTING PROMENADE PARK AND HEADWATERS PARK WHILE ALSO OPENING THE RIVERFRONT AT PROMENADE

## PARK MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT.

THIS YEAR, WE'LL SEE CONSTRUCTION ON THE NEXT PHASE OF RIVERFRONT PUBLIC SPACE THAT WILL EXTEND OFFERINGS TO THE NORTH SIDE OF THE ST. MARYS RIVER BETWEEN EWING AND CLINTON STREETS.

AMENITIES WILL INCLUDE AN EXTENSION OF THE TREE CANOPY TRAIL, RIVER ACCESS POINTS, AMPHITHEATER, AND A UNIVERSALLY-ACCESSIBLE BOULDER MOUND.

THE LOFTS OF HEADWATERS PARK, ALONG CLINTON AND SUPERIOR STREETS, IS MAKING PROGRESS, AND WE ANTICIPATE THE PARKING GARAGE THERE BEING FINISHED LATER THIS YEAR AND THE ENTIRE DEVELOPMENT TO BE COMPLETED IN 2025.

WORK HAS ALSO STARTED ON MORE BREWING, THE FIRST PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT ON THE NORTH RIVER SITE.

THIS UNIQUE RESTAURANT AND BREWERY IS SCHEDULED TO OPEN IN 2025.

THE ASHBERRY, A SEVEN-STORY DEVELOPMENT ON MAIN STREET THAT FEATURES COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL SPACE, PUBLIC PARKING, AND WILL SERVE AS THE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS FOR STAR FINANCIAL BANK, WILL BE OPENING VERY SOON.

ALSO ALONG MAIN STREET IS THE PEARL, A PROJECT LED BY SURACK ENTERPRISES.

THIS PRIVATE INVESTMENT WILL INCLUDE COMMERCIAL AND EVENT SPACE AS WELL AS HOUSING.

WE'RE ANTICIPATING THE PEARL TO BE FINISHED LATER THIS YEAR.

INCIDENTALLY, PARKVIEW FIELD WILL BE CELEBRATING 15 YEARS IN DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE THIS YEAR.

THE BALLPARK AND MIXED-USE OFFERINGS AS PART OF THE HARRISON SQUARE DEVELOPMENT HAVE BEEN THE CATALYST FOR THE MANY SUCCESSES WE'RE SEEING TODAY.

A BILLION DOLLARS WAS INVESTED IN THE HEART OF THE CITY OVER THE PAST DECADE AND ANOTHER BILLION DOLLARS IS PROJECTED OVER THE NEXT 10

YEARS AS WE CONTINUE OUR REVITALIZATION EFFORTS.

SOUTHEAST FORT WAYNE IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HOW WE'RE MOVING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION.

THE CITY AND PARKVIEW HEALTH JOINED FORCES TO OPEN THE PONTIAC STREET MARKET – A FULL-SERVICE GROCERY STORE.

THE MARKET PROVIDES HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE FOOD OPTIONS IN AN AREA THAT'S DEFINED AS A FOOD DESERT.

PHASE ONE OF THE PONTIAC STREETScape PROJECT FROM HANNA TO OLIVER STREETS WAS COMPLETED WITH SIDEWALKS, NEW LANDSCAPING, SEATING, IMPROVED LIGHTING, AND THE ADDITION OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE.

PHASE TWO WILL START THIS YEAR ON PONTIAC FROM OLIVER TO SOUTH ANTHONY BOULEVARD.

MCKINNIE COMMONS AT SOUTH ANTHONY AND MCKINNIE AVENUE OPENED IN 2023 AS OUR NEWEST PARK AND PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE.

IT'S ENCOURAGING TO SEE SO MANY PEOPLE ENJOYING THIS NEW OFFERING TO BRING RESIDENTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS TOGETHER IN A RELAXING SETTING.

WE'RE SEEING INCREASED HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES AS WELL SOUTHEAST.

VILLAGE PREMIER IS A MIXED-INCOME, NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER DEVELOPMENT.

PHASE ONE SHOULD BE COMPLETED THIS SUMMER WITH MORE THAN 200 UNITS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND NINE MARKET RATE SINGLE FAMILY HOMES.

AND THERE'S MORE - ROOSEVELT RESERVES NEAR TILLMAN AND HESSEN CASSEL ROADS, THE FIRST MARKET RATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN 50 YEARS IN SOUTHEAST FORT WAYNE, IS UNDERWAY.

IT WILL HAVE 49 SINGLE FAMILY HOMES AS PART OF PHASE ONE.

THIS IS A CATALYTIC PROJECT ALIGNED WITH THE SOUTHEAST STRATEGY UPDATE.

BY ATTRACTING NEW OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS, FAMILIES WILL BE ABLE

TO BUILD WEALTH THROUGH HOMEOWNERSHIP AND STIMULATE FURTHER INVESTMENT.

ADDITIONALLY, I'M INTRIGUED BY THE NEW DATA CENTER PROJECT IN THE AREA OF ADAMS CENTER ROAD.

THERE'S NO QUESTION, GOOGLE IS A MAJOR WIN FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

THIS DEVELOPMENT IS A ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY THAT WILL BRING EXCELLENT JOBS, NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES, AND FURTHER STRENGTHEN FORT WAYNE AS AN IDEAL LOCATION FOR BUSINESSES TO INVEST.

I WANT TO PERSONALLY THANK GREATER FORT WAYNE, THE CITY OF NEW HAVEN, THE COUNTY OF ALLEN, AND MY STAFF FOR THE AMOUNT OF WORK THAT WENT INTO GETTING THE NECESSARY APPROVALS TO MOVE THE DATA CENTER PROJECT ACROSS THE FINISH LINE.

OUR EFFORTS DOWNTOWN AND SOUTHEAST ALSO COMPLEMENT WHAT WE'RE ACCOMPLISHING IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS – THE BACKBONE OF FORT WAYNE.

NEIGHBORHOOD PRIDE IS INCREASING THROUGH PLANNING AND ACTIVATION EFFORTS.

LED BY OUR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION, NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT GRANTS ARE ON THE RISE WITH 47 GRANTS GOING OUT LAST YEAR CITYWIDE.

THE PACKARD 2030 PLAN IS ASSISTING THE 18 NEIGHBORHOODS LOCATED IN THAT AREA SOUTH OF DOWNTOWN.

A PEOPLE-FOCUSED GOVERNMENT SEES RESULTS LIKE THE FORT-IFY PROGRAM THAT'S TRAINING PEOPLE TO BECOME BETTER LEADERS AND IN TURN BUILDING STRONGER NEIGHBORHOODS WITH OPEN COMMUNICATION, TRUST, AND BOLD IDEAS.

AND CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN IS A PARTNERSHIP AMONG SEVERAL CITY DEPARTMENTS AND NEIGHBORHOODS – PARTICULARLY IN THE BLOOMINGDALE, NEBRASKA, AND HAMILTON AREAS.

WE'RE CONTINUALLY LOOKING FOR BETTER WAYS TO SERVE THE PUBLIC.

SO, TODAY I'M ANNOUNCING 'ENGAGE FORT WAYNE.'

THIS NEW WEBSITE – *ENGAGE DOT CITY OF FORT WAYNE DOT ORG* – IS A ONE-STOP LOCATION TO LEARN ABOUT CITY PROJECTS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOODS.

YOU'LL ALSO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE INPUT AND SHARE EXPERIENCES THAT HELP SHAPE IMPORTANT INITIATIVES.

ENGAGE FORT WAYNE WILL BEGIN WITH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, PARKS, AND PUBLIC WORKS, AND IN THE COMING WEEKS WE HOPE TO ADD MORE DEPARTMENTS.

HUMAN INTERACTION AND ATTENTION LIKE THAT IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE CONSTRUCTION THAT'S EVIDENT ALL ACROSS FORT WAYNE.

FOR INSTANCE, OUR PUBLIC WORKS DIVISION SET A RECORD OF OVER 40-MILLION DOLLARS IN NEIGHBORHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS IN 2023.

IN FACT, SINCE 2014, WE'VE INVESTED NEARLY 300-MILLION DOLLARS IN NEIGHBORHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE SENDING A STRONG MESSAGE THAT WE CARE ABOUT AND LISTEN TO NEIGHBORHOODS.

A SPECIAL MOMENT FOR ME AND MANY OTHERS LAST SEPTEMBER WAS THE DEDICATION CEREMONY FOR THE NEW FORT WAYNE VETERANS MEMORIAL BRIDGE ALONG LAFAYETTE STREET AND SPY RUN AVENUE.

THE RENOVATION OF THIS SIGNATURE GATEWAY BRIDGE PROVIDES MOTORISTS AND PEDESTRIANS WITH SAFE AND INNOVATIVE WAYS TO NAVIGATE FORT WAYNE.

WE'RE NOW PROJECTING IN 2024 THAT PUBLIC WORKS WILL INVEST NEARLY 50-MILLION DOLLARS THROUGH NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECTS IN ALL AREAS OF THE CITY.

WE'LL SEE IMPROVEMENTS ALONG COOK ROAD, ARDMORE AVENUE, EDSALL AVENUE, AND COVINGTON KNOLL ESTATES, AS WELL AS BRIDGE WORK ON LOWER HUNTINGTON ROAD, BLUFFTON ROAD, AND GOEGLEIN ROAD.

OUR EVER-GROWING TRAILS NETWORK OF 142 MILES WILL EXPAND FURTHER WITH WORK THIS YEAR ON THE LIBERTY MILLS ROAD TRAIL AND SUMMIT PARK TRAIL.

WE'LL ALSO BID OUT PROJECTS TO BE STARTED IN 2025 THAT INCLUDE THE ILLINOIS ROAD TRAIL, HANNA STREET TRAIL, WHEELOCK ROAD TRAIL, AND PUFFERBELLY TRAIL EXTENSION.

SUCCESSFUL CITIES THAT LEAD THE WAY MUST PROVIDE SAFE, DEPENDABLE, AND AFFORDABLE WATER, SEWER, AND STORMWATER SERVICES AND CONTINUOUSLY MAINTAIN AND UPGRADE INFRASTRUCTURE.

LAST YEAR, CITY UTILITIES INVESTED OVER 130-MILLION DOLLARS TO ENHANCE NEIGHBORHOODS, AND PLANS CALL FOR 135-MILLION DOLLARS IN PROJECTS THIS YEAR.

PART OF THIS WORK WILL CONNECT THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF INDIAN VILLAGE, WOODHURST, AND HARTMAN ROAD TO OUR DEEP ROCK TUNNEL.

AND WE'LL BE UPGRADING WATER PIPES ALONG BLUFFTON AND LIMA ROADS, AND STORMWATER DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS WILL OCCUR ALONG MCKINNIE AVENUE AND THE LANGFORD OAKS NEIGHBORHOOD.

LED BY CITY UTILITIES, WE'RE PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT, POSITIONING FORT WAYNE FOR FUTURE GROWTH, PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CAREERS THROUGH INTERNSHIPS, AND BEING RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF RATEPAYER DOLLARS.

IT IS CLEAR THAT WE'RE HITTING ON ALL CYLINDERS AND HAVE BECOME A CONSISTENT AWARD-WINNER AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS.

NOTEWORTHY ACCOMPLISHMENTS THIS YEAR INCLUDE BEING NAMED THE 7<sup>TH</sup> BEST RUN CITY IN THE COUNTRY, THE 5<sup>TH</sup> MOST AFFORDABLE CITY TO LIVE IN THE U-S, THE 2<sup>ND</sup> TOP EMERGING HOUSING MARKET NATIONALLY, AND THE 4<sup>TH</sup> BEST CITY FOR JOB OPENINGS.

TO BE RECOGNIZED BY WALLETHUB, U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, AND REALTOR.COM SAYS A LOT ABOUT FORT WAYNE'S STANDING AMONG REPUTABLE ORGANIZATIONS.

THESE TYPES OF ACCOLADES HELP US ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT.

IN FACT, OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH GREATER FORT WAYNE HELPED PRODUCE A SUCCESSFUL 2023 WITH 11 COMPANIES INVESTING MORE THAN 45-MILLION DOLLARS.

THIS LED TO THE CREATION OF 184 JOBS AND 405 JOBS WERE RETAINED.

THE AVERAGE WAGE FOR THESE POSITIONS WAS OVER 80-THOUSAND DOLLARS.

BUSINESSES LIKE TIPPMANN GROUP, CME CORPORATION, ASHER AGENCY, AND MARATHON LABELS ARE SENDING A STRONG MESSAGE THAT THEY BELIEVE IN FORT WAYNE.

OUR COMMUNITY IS ALSO LEADING THE WAY AS A POINT OF DESTINATION.

VISIT FORT WAYNE CONTINUES TO USE INNOVATION AND PROACTIVE STRATEGIES TO BRING MORE THAN EIGHT MILLION VISITORS TO FORT WAYNE EACH YEAR.

OUR GUESTS SPEND 995-MILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY AND HELP SUPPORT MORE THAN 13-THOUSAND JOBS LOCALLY.

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT WE'RE BUILDING A QUALITY OF LIFE HERE THAT'S SECOND TO NONE WITH A FOCUS ON ARTS, CULTURE, AND HOUSING TO NAME A FEW.

FOR INSTANCE, THE PUBLIC ART COMMISSION LED THE SPECIAL COMMEMORATION OF THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JUNIOR WITH THE UNVEILING OF THE PILLARS OF HOPE AND JUSTICE SCULPTURE.

ALSO, A SIGNIFICANT RENOVATION TO THE ARTS UNITED CENTER WILL LAUNCH LATER THIS YEAR.

OUR ATTENTION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS AND CULTURE IS VITAL TO THE IDENTITY OF OUR COMMUNITY. IT SAYS A LOT ABOUT WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE GOING.

HOUSING STRATEGIES ARE A MAJOR FOCUS FOR US TO INCREASE THE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

WE'RE EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF INTRODUCING NEW HOUSING PRODUCTS AND PROMOTING INFILL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT BY PROVIDING SHOVEL READY SITES.

THROUGH OUR OFFICE OF HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES AND OTHER LOCAL PARTNERS, WE HAVE A DETAILED PLAN, CALLED EVERYONE HOME, TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS IN FORT WAYNE.

OUR DEDICATION TO BEING A CARING AND GIVING COMMUNITY SPEAKS VOLUMES.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PUBLIC TO ENJOY OUTDOOR RECREATION IS OVERSEEN BY OUR OUTSTANDING PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT.

THE SUCCESSES AND POPULARITY OF OUR 89 PARKS ARE NOTICEABLE.

THE FRANKE PARK RENAISSANCE TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND FORT WAYNE'S LARGEST PARK IS OFF TO A GREAT START.

THIS NEARLY 24-MILLION DOLLAR INITIATIVE IS EXPECTED TO BE FINISHED LATE THIS YEAR WITH A NEW ENTRANCE OFF GOSHEN AVENUE AND A YEAR-ROUND ENCLOSED PAVILION.

WORK WILL CONTINUE ON THE FOSTER PARK GOLF COURSE MASTER PLAN, NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT AT MULTIPLE PARKS, MORE CITY STREET TREES, AND THE REDEVELOPMENT OF BREWER AND PACKARD PARKS.

AS WE SURVEY RESIDENTS ON A REGULAR BASIS, NEIGHBORHOOD INFRASTRUCTURE, PARKS, AND PUBLIC SAFETY ALWAYS SEEM TO COME TO THE TOP OF THE LIST.

IT IS OUR OBLIGATION AS AN ADMINISTRATION TO LISTEN AND DELIVER RESULTS.

AND TO THAT POINT, I CONTINUE TO BE ENCOURAGED AND IMPRESSED WITH THE LEVELS OF SERVICE LED BY THE POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS.

WE LIVE IN A SAFE CITY.

OUR POLICE OFFICERS RESPONDED TO MORE THAN 140-THOUSAND CALLS FOR SERVICE IN 2023, AND THE DEPARTMENT HAD A CLEARANCE RATE OF OVER 90 PERCENT ON HOMICIDES.

THE POLICE DEPARTMENT WILL HAVE ANOTHER RECRUIT CLASS THIS YEAR THAT WILL KEEP THE BUDGETED NUMBER OF OFFICERS PATROLLING CITY STREETS TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC AT 500.

OUR DEPARTMENT WILL FOCUS ON THE EXPANSION OF THE DOWNTOWN BIKE PATROL, AS WELL AS A STUDY OF THE REAL TIME CRIME CENTER IMPLEMENTATION.



AND THEY'LL EXPLORE THE LAUNCH OF A TRAFFIC UNIT TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ON TRAFFIC LAWS TO IMPROVE THE SAFETY OF OUR ROADWAYS AND LOOK AT ENFORCEMENT MEASURES.

IN ADDITION, THE POLICE DEPARTMENT WILL EXPAND ITS DRONES AS FIRST RESPONDERS, AND THE FIRST EVER RIVER PATROL DEPLOYMENT WILL BEGIN.

THIS YEAR ALSO REPRESENTS LEADERSHIP CHANGE AS WE HAVE A NEW POLICE CHIEF, SCOTT CAUDILL.

SCOTT'S YEARS OF SERVICE IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT CAPACITIES WITH THE FWPD, ALONG WITH THE LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT HE POSSESSES, HAVE PREPARED HIM FOR THIS TIME.

SCOTT'S ABILITY TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE AND HIS STRONG DEMONSTRATION OF COMMITMENT TO FORT WAYNE HAVE POSITIONED HIM TO BE AN EXCELLENT LEADER OF OUR POLICE DEPARTMENT.

WE ALL TAKE COMFORT IN KNOWING PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL WILL BE THERE FOR US.

OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT RESPONDED TO OVER 26-THOUSAND EMERGENCY CALLS FOR SERVICE IN 2023, COMPLETED 180-THOUSAND HOURS OF TRAINING, AND GAVE NEARLY 300 FIRE SAFETY PROGRAMS TO 20-THOUSAND STUDENTS.

A CLEAR HIGHLIGHT FROM 2023 WAS THE OPENING OF THE NEW FIRE STATION 14 AT EAST STATE BOULEVARD AND REED ROAD THAT WAS PAID FOR WITH CASH.

WE HAVE ALSO IMPROVED OUR ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO EMERGENCIES AND INCREASE FIREFIGHTER SAFETY.

TWO EXAMPLES OF THAT ARE NEW HANDHELD RADIOS AND SELF-CONTAINED BREATHING APPARATUS AIR PACKS OBTAINED WITH THE HELP FROM FEDERAL GRANT DOLLARS.

AND THIS YEAR WE'LL BE INITIATING THE DESIGN OF A NEW FIRE STATION FIVE IN WAYNE DALE WITH THE EXPECTATION OF BREAKING GROUND IN 2025.

IN ADDITION, THE FIRE DEPARTMENT WILL HAVE ANOTHER RECRUIT CLASS WITH THE GOAL OF MAINTAINING STAFF LEVELS OF 370 FIREFIGHTERS.

WE'LL ALSO TAKE POSSESSION OF SIX NEW APPARATUS AS PART OF OUR ONGOING PLEDGE TO HAVE THE BEST EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY POSSIBLE

FOR OUR FIRST RESPONDERS.

I'M GRATEFUL, TOO, THAT WE HAVE A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL DEPARTMENT AS PART OF OUR PUBLIC SAFETY TEAM.

ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL OFFICERS COMPLETED MORE THAN 22-THOUSAND ACTIVITIES IN 2023.

AND THE DEPARTMENT CONTINUES EFFORTS TO INCREASE ANIMAL ADOPTIONS AND REDUCE THE OVERPOPULATION OF ANIMALS.

WE HAVE UNSUNG HEROES THERE DEDICATED TO THE WELL-BEING OF ANIMALS AND PET OWNERS THROUGH RETENTION EFFORTS, EDUCATION, PROGRAMMING, AND PROVIDING NEEDED RESOURCES.

A CLEAR INDICATOR OF A CITY ON THE MOVE IS FISCAL HEALTH.

THANKS TO OUR CITY CONTROLLER'S OFFICE AND CITY COUNCIL, WE CONTINUE TO BE GOOD STEWARDS OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS.

WE HAVE A BALANCED BUDGET, A ROBUST SAVINGS ACCOUNT, AND HAVE BEEN RECOGNIZED WITH A NATIONAL AWARD FOR BEING FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE AND TRANSPARENT.

THERE'S NO QUESTION, I'M OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FORT WAYNE'S FUTURE.

I SAY THAT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. ONE OF WHICH IS OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

WE ARE HOME TO CHAMPIONS. HOMESTEAD GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY, BISHOP LUERS FOOTBALL, AND SNIDER FOOTBALL EACH WON STATE TITLES IN 2023.

WHAT A TREMENDOUS HONOR TO BE CALLED A STATE CHAMPION.

COACHES AND TEAM CAPTAINS HAVE JOINED US TODAY.

**{PLEASE STAND TO BE RECOGNIZED.}**

**{THANK YOU FOR REPRESENTING OUR COMMUNITY WITH GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP AND OUTSTANDING TEAMWORK. CONGRATULATIONS.}**

I'M ALSO PROUD OF MY MAYOR'S YOUTH ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL.

THIS DIVERSE GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CONTINUES TO IMPRESS ME.

FROM ORGANIZING MENTAL HEALTH SUMMITS TO VOLUNTEERING WITH THE SALVATION ARMY AND THE Y-W-C-A, THIS TEAM IS GAINING VALUABLE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND PROVIDING GREAT INPUT INTO LOCAL DECISION-MAKING.

WE'RE ALSO GOING TO BE LEADING THE WAY INTO THE FUTURE THROUGH UPCOMING INITIATIVES TO MOVE FORT WAYNE FORWARD IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION.

FIRST, IT'S IMPERATIVE THAT WE EMBRACE THE NEED TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

LAST YEAR, OUR FIRST-EVER CLIMATE ACTION PLAN WAS PUT INTO PLACE CALLED SUSTAINING FORT WAYNE.

WE'RE NOW TAKING STEPS FORWARD WITH A READINESS ROADMAP TO IDENTIFY PRIORITIES AND ESTABLISH SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS.

CITY DEPARTMENTS WILL SET STANDARDS TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS, AND WE'LL BE PLANNING FOR FUTURE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

ADDITIONALLY, WE'VE SUBMITTED A COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY.

THIS INITIATIVE IS DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THE USE OF SOLAR POWER THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITY.

WE MUST BE OPEN TO EXPLORE AND IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF ENERGY AND REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT.

ANOTHER NEW PLAN FOR 2024 IS TO FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON JOBS OF THE FUTURE.

WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT A TOP PRIORITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY IS CREATING AND RETAINING JOBS.

THAT'S WHY I'M SO COMMITTED TO BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION TO HELP PREPARE STUDENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL CAREERS.

LEADERS AT OUR LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES SHARE A COMMON GOAL OF EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND TEACHING METHODS THAT WILL BENEFIT STUDENTS.

OUR EMPLOYERS ARE DEPENDING ON US TO PROVIDE A SKILLED WORKFORCE READY TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF AN EVER-CHANGING ECONOMY.

THE EDUCATION PATH WE CHOOSE TODAY WILL IMPACT HOW FORT WAYNE IS VIEWED BY COMPANIES LOOKING TO GROW OR MOVE HERE.

CITIES THAT THRIVE AND SUCCEED MUST HAVE ACCESS TO CAPITAL AND ITS FUNDING SOURCES.

THAT'S WHY THIS YEAR WE'RE ADDING A GRANT ADMINISTRATOR TO FOCUS ON HOW TO MAXIMIZE OUR ABILITIES TO APPLY FOR AND RECEIVE GRANT DOLLARS FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

POTENTIAL FUNDING WILL BENEFIT OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH ALL OF THE MAJOR DIVISIONS IN OUR CITY – FIRE, POLICE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC WORKS, PARKS, AND MORE.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE PROSPECT OF PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE RETURNING TO FORT WAYNE GOT A SIGNIFICANT BOOST RECENTLY WITH A GRANT FROM THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION.

WE'VE BEEN CHOSEN TO LEAD A MULTI-STATE EFFORT TO DEVELOP A PLAN THAT WILL CONNECT CHICAGO TO PITTSBURGH THROUGH FORT WAYNE.

THE GRANT WILL FUND MORE THAN 80 PERCENT OF THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PLANNING, PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING, AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW.

WORK WILL BEGIN THIS YEAR TO COMPLETE A SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN TO MOVE US TO THE NEXT STEP.

WE BELIEVE THIS IS OUR BEST CHANCE YET TO RESTORE PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO FORT WAYNE.

FRIENDS, TODAY WE'VE BEEN REMINDED OF HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO CALL FORT WAYNE HOME.

TRULY, WE LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY IN A CITY LIKE NO OTHER WHOSE TIME IS NOW TO MAKE AN IMPACT FOR THIS GENERATION AND GENERATIONS TO FOLLOW.

THERE'S NO DOUBT MANY OF YOU HAVE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN OUR RECENT SUCCESSES.

AND AS A RESULT OF YOUR COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT TO BEING THE VERY BEST, THE STATE OF OUR CITY IS STRONG.

BUT WE MUST KEEP PRESSING AHEAD OR FACE THE RISK OF FALLING BEHIND.

LET'S KEEP MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER.

I'M READY TO EMBARK ON A NEW JOURNEY FILLED WITH PROJECTS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND A PROMISE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW.

BY LEADING THE WAY, WE'RE DESTINED TO EXPERIENCE MORE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR OUR GREAT CITY.

WE'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TO ENGAGE, INNOVATE, AND PERFORM, WHICH HAVE BEEN THE PILLARS OF MY ADMINISTRATION FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS.

AND THE WEST POINT MAXIM STILL HOLDS TRUE AS A GUIDING PHILOSOPHY FOR FORT WAYNE.

WE'LL CONTINUE TO RISK MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS SAFE.

WE'LL CARE MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS WISE.

WE'LL DREAM MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS PRACTICAL.

AND WE'LL EXPECT MORE THAN OTHERS THINK IS POSSIBLE.

GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS THE CITY OF FORT WAYNE.

THANK YOU.