

# City of Streetsboro

## State of the City

Good morning and welcome to the 2024 Streetsboro State of the City address. I want to especially welcome you to our brand new, recently completed Streetsboro Community Center. I'd like to take a moment and recognize our special guests and political officials in attendance today. Thank you all very much for joining us this morning.

I want you all to look around. What you are seeing is the culmination of 3 years of hard work, collaboration, cooperation, and pure vision. Three years ago, we started this project, with an idea based on what we knew we wanted for our city, a place that the residents could be proud of and gather in. To move that idea from concept to reality, we were lucky to find a great architect, Level Heads, to bring those dreams to life. We sat with them through numerous meetings, relaying to them what we would like to see. Their vision of what this could be was brought to life in those meetings and now you are here, witnessing this vision brought to reality. We could not have asked for a better partner in this venture. Projects of this magnitude require a team effort. The design team consisted of Greg Mytinger, Missy Procop, Justin Czekaj, John Czeskowski, Matt Miller, the Architects, Level Heads, and the construction team with our contractor, Panzica Construction. This group helped us not only figure out how to design the building and get it out of the ground, but also how to really stretch our dollars. The inflation we all feel at the grocery store and at the gas pump is very present in the construction field and we were able to bring this project to completion on time and within budget.

While the design team and I had a vision, the only people authorized for this kind of expense are the members of City Council. They not only bought into the vision and kept writing the checks, but they were instrumental in allowing us to make the building bigger and more flexible for multiple uses and users. We always kept it in the forefront of our mind that this was going to be for the community and for a permanent home for our Senior Center. Finally, I would like to thank the Seniors for being patient with city hall. They lost their original home when we had to demolish the city hall, and then again when the McMichael Building was bought out and recently were reliving their glory years by walking down the halls of the old Streetsboro schools. I know that this was not easy on them, but I can only hope that they are happy to have a new, permanent facility. I also thank the Streetsboro Schools and the School Board for allowing us to temporarily house the seniors at their facility. Our relationship with them keeps getting better.

I would like all of the Directors of the individual Departments to stand up and be recognized. The folks you see in front of you are the culmination of 12 years of kissing some frogs who didn't share in my vision for what the city could be but these folks are the best out there. They always work very hard to do the best that we all can to serve the citizens of Streetsboro.

I'd like the attending Council members to stand up and be recognized. These folks absolutely represent the very best group of Council people that this city has ever elected. These people get it. Over the last few years, the relationship between Council and the Mayor and administration is the absolute main reason this city is moving forward in the direction it is. I say that because our country was founded on the principle of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. I can unequivocally say that the members

of City Council, the Department Directors, and myself are just constantly striving toward that ideal. We are totally invested in this community and want to give the citizens of Streetsboro not only what they need but what they want. This can only occur when you are all on the same path and travelling down the same road. We respect each other, we listen to each other, we share thoughts and ideas. We don't always agree with one another, but we are able to come to a decision that has been looked at from all sides. Under no circumstances is Council or the Directors "yes" people, we all share very equally in the thought and decision-making process to make Streetsboro the best it can be. I cannot thank Council, the Department Directors and especially the employees of the city enough for their efforts in making our city a great place to live for our residents.

This community center is just a portion of the great things that happened in the city last year. Our income base is manufacturing, and we were lucky to not be too adversely affected by the pandemic. Since the pandemic, our economy has actually seen some great years and increased business activity. Last year, we had 19 businesses that opened or relocated to the city. One of those businesses, Another Broken Egg, is serving you this delicious breakfast. Some other highlights include the new UH urgent care, Rita's Ice Cream taking over the long vacant structure on the public square, and several new businesses in Market Square.

I just said that we operate city hall as an organization for and by the people and that extends to economic development too. A new 150,000 SF cold storage warehouse will soon begin construction on SR 43 but originally, they wanted to locate some very noisy equipment very close to the border of Camelot Village. The Economic Development and Planning Directors worked with them to reposition the building so it would create minimal disruptions to our residents. And we did it all by being conservative with our tax breaks. In return for the new jobs and taking care of our residents, we offered a 30% property tax abatement for only 5 years. We also got them to commit to a cash donation so we can improve our signage at the public square. For the people, by the people.

One of the major things that Patrick brought forth was the forming of a JEDD with Shalersville township. This has opened so many possibilities not only for us but for Shalersville and the entire region. Over 500 acres of industrial land, with 1,000,000 square feet already constructed and a new German company, Viega, that is under construction as we speak. This is the largest investment in Portage County in several decades and was a lot of work, but the deal was structured in a way where only minimal tax abatement was offered but quality manufacturing jobs will materialize. The jobs that these facilities will create will add significantly to the bottom line of Shalersville Township and also add to our bottom line through a partnership agreement where the income taxes are shared between the two communities. Providing good wages for the folks not only in our area but from as far away as Youngstown and Lorain. One of our biggest assets is the vastness of the area that we can draw prospective employees from. We have capitalized on that.

Again, there is so much for us to be proud of and thankful for. We're sitting in a building that we have paid cash for. We are in the process of what has been termed the infrastructure project, a complete transformation of the area in front of the Fire Station at the old city hall site. This is part of a much bigger project that will completely transform that site. The infrastructure project will create a central gathering place for our residents and guests, with an area in the center bigger than a football field where we can have farmers markets, craft shows, small concerts and a whole litany of other things. We are paying cash for this also.

Beginning this spring the next phase of the project will be the amenities package phase which will see the construction of a new 5,000 square foot splash pad to be completed hopefully by late July or early August, as well as a restroom facility and a picnic area, all paid for with cash. We are currently in the design phase for a new 14,500 square foot city hall that will hopefully break ground in June, this will be the only phase where we will have to finance a project.

Then, next spring, we will commence construction on a new, inclusive playground for ALL our children to enjoy. That would complete the major phases of the project. But, as we move forward there will be enhancements to this in the form of a passive walking area between the apartments and SR 14, as well as adding a gazebo and other amenities to the oval. This area will be a showcase for the city and could not be possible without the collaboration and cooperation that we have between our elected officials, our departments, and our residents.

One of the hurdles that we have had to overcome was that the city, many years ago, was poorly planned. I don't think it was by design, but I don't think the folks from many years ago saw what was coming. With the Turnpike exit and the terminus of I-480, I don't think they could envision what was going to happen to our city. The Turnpike exit alone is responsible for over 6.6 million cars a year getting on and off and with the end of I-480 dumping into the city, our traffic can be a nightmare sometimes. These both have contributed significantly to our growth, making the SR14 corridor a very desirable location for retail and restaurants that attract people from all over.

With the previous lack of planning and available funding, we have been behind the eight-ball trying to get our infrastructure, roads and traffic control up to speed. It can truly be said that our city's flower is the orange cones that have seemed to populate our roadways for the last 5 or 6 years. We have undertaken many projects and have been able to secure funding for the projects to the tune of around \$40,000,000 in federal and state grants while only having about a 12% investment from the city. I must give credit where credit is due and thank our Consulting Engineers, the GPD Group, for showing me the way to apply and get these grants and funding. I don't know where we would be without them. We have not only been able to invest in the state routes that crisscross the city, but a few years back, Council mandated that we spend a million dollars a year on our city road projects. We have combined that money with OPWC money to expand that funding even further. We have been able to very significantly upgrade our city streets from what once were very substandard to the point now where, by an independent ratings consultant, our roads rate among the best in the area. On their scale a road system that is rated above 70 is very good-to-excellent, our last rating put our roads at a 74. For the longest time, we relied on our consulting Engineers as the primary source of Engineering for the city. We had not had a city engineer on staff for over 15 years. That all changed when I was given the go ahead by City Council to hire a City Engineer. Justin Czekaj was hired in 2021. Since that time, we have been able to do much more for our citizens and have saved money in the process by being able to plan and execute many of our projects in house. He has brought significant knowledge and insight that has been a benefit to our city greatly and will continue to be of benefit to us. He has worked hand in hand with our Service Director Bill Miller, who has served our city for over 40 years. The knowledge this man has of our city is unsurpassed. I cannot thank him and the Service and Water people enough for the efforts they put forth in giving us the excellence in service that our residents deserve.

Along with our growth, we have had to overcome many other hurdles in our planning processes. Our Zoning Code was written at a time when people could not have seen the growth that is happening in our city. We have had and met our challenges head on, it has not always been easy. John Cieszkowski, our Planning and Zoning Director, has had to overcome many challenges. First, he was a one-man army and was completely overwhelmed with the challenges he faced. Thank fully we were finally able to get him

some help and we have very successfully navigated many of the challenges we have faced. I'm sure that you all have seen the social media pages lamenting about the carwashes and hotels that have popped up. We were finally able to work with a consultant to craft regulations that did not "arbitrarily and capriciously" prohibit the building of more than our share. He has successfully put together 3 master plans that have allowed us to put in motion those things that will continue to allow our city to grow in an orderly manner. I'm very proud of how far we have come and will continue to move forward. We will continue to amend and refine our Zoning Code to allow us to grow and prosper in an orderly fashion.

I am immensely proud of our Parks system. Greg Mytinger and his very limited staff has managed to turn our park system in to a jewel in our crown. We are a wanted destination for many baseball and softball tournaments, sometimes having up to 60 teams playing on our 10 fields. In the last year alone, we have added a lit sand volleyball court, we rebuilt our basketball courts, we rehabbed our tennis courts and have added pickleball courts. We've also added a new pavilion, we've upgraded Thomas Heritage Park, and this year, we will see the creation of a new destination, Floyd North Park which is located near our industrial sector. This could not have been accomplished without significant help from our Representative, Gail Pavliga. She was able to obtain funding from the state capital budget, and this area will be soon become another offering for our citizens to relax and enjoy. In addition, Greg and his staff provide year-round programs for our entire demographic spectrum. From all of the programs to our highly successful Trunk or Treat, they do it all and they do it very well!

In addition to serving as the Chief Elected Officer of the City of Streetsboro, I am also the Public Safety Director. In this role, I oversee the operations of the PD and FD. I do this to ensure not only the wellbeing of our citizens but to ensure that the safety services providers are accountable to the public tax payer. I have to trust my front-line officers to not only keep themselves safe, but also to keep our residents and employers safe. I know from experience of running into burning buildings throughout my career as a fireman that these jobs are not for the faint of heart but it takes more than just bravery, now the job requires a lot of brains.

A great example of the mixture between brains and bravery is Officer Josh Bartholomew. Sometimes instead of storming into a situation, we need someone with a lot of diplomacy and the ability to really listen to what someone is saying, especially when the police are called to deal with a mental health situation. Recently, Josh was recognized for this ability in de-escalating tense situations by receiving the Crisis Intervention Team Champion of the year for the entire State of Ohio for his work in training many of his fellow officers in de-escalation techniques as well as his work with the mental health recovery board. Our new K-9 police pup, Mika, is the one getting all the attention but Officer Bartholomew, while not as cute, is the kind of officer we really need to recognize. We are all appreciative of the great work he has done.

Like many of you in the audience, I have children. While my oldest just graduated, I was often worried about school safety. The city is one of only a handful of cities across the state that do not charge the public schools for the presence of an officer. Having a police presence in our schools is a sad reality, but one that we embrace as I don't want any of my residents to worry about the safety of their children. We are actively trying to recruit a second school resource officer for increased peace of mind for our residents. I am very thankful for both the Fire and Police leadership both partnering together to undertake a joint training exercise at the Streetsboro Middle School this past October. Not only did our safety forces learn more about the buildings in case there ever was an emergency, now our schools have some concept of how we would mobilize and respond to a threat in case the worst ever did come to pass. The time to prepare for an emergency is not when it is happening, but when all seems calm. Each department, as well as county agencies like the Emergency Management Agency, will now know their role and clear lines of demarcation for fast and effective response. Our Fire and Police Departments are working hand in hand

and that is to the benefit of us all. Kudos to Chief Rob Reinholz and Chief Patricia Wain for their leadership in the Fire and Police Department.

Everything and everybody that has been mentioned above could not do their jobs without funding. We are very lucky to have Matt Miller as our Finance Director. He has brought new insight to our Finances. This is no easy task; he and his staff work tirelessly to ensure that we all have the necessary funds to do our work for the city. He brought a new perspective to our Finances with his analytic abilities and his long-term planning. He introduced weekly planning sessions with our directors to look into the future for our Capital expenditures so that we may adequately forecast and fund all the projects that we have going on. The pie is only so big, and he makes sure that everyone gets a piece of the pie. We all have wants and we all have needs and he does a great job of minding our dollars. We have been very lucky in that our available funding has increased nearly every year and we have been able to offer more benefits to our citizens because of that. But we still must remain conservative in our finances and plan for the future. We would not be able to expand our offerings without proper financial planning and Matt and his staff bring that to the table. One of the people that has been rock steady since day 1 is my Executive Assistant Missy Procop. Her job has expanded in so many ways and she excelled at every task she has taken on. Her list of job duties would most likely fill a page. We all need a person that we can turn to, keep us on track and focused on the task at hand. I'm the type of person that when I feel that I have a great idea that it is the best idea. I can always rely on her to bring me back to earth and offer a different perspective. I have the utmost respect and confidence in her decision-making process and I depend on her to give me a counter just to make me think a little more.

Before I close, I did want to bring your attention to 2 folks that are in attendance today. Since they brought their business into Streetsboro a few years back, they have been a bright spot for our community. They are the perfect example of giving back. They are the owners of our Dairy Queen, Randy and Natalie Monahan. A few weeks ago the Chamber and I presented them with a new award. It was called "the Over The Top Award". They are there for our community at every turn, they are generous and giving in every way imaginable. If the world had more people like Randy and Natalie, it would be a much better place. Please join me in thanking them for all that they have done and I'm sure will continue to do!

I have only touched the tip of the iceberg. We have so much going on in the city, sometimes it is difficult to keep track of it all. We have come a long way, and we still have a way to go but we will get there. I am very happy that 82% of the people in Streetsboro had faith in me to keep the city moving forward. It shows that we are doing the right thing, one thing I have learned is that you are never going to please everyone but when we can get an approval rating like that, it gives you a lot of confidence. The council and I will continue to work together. This is not the job where you can be autonomous, and we have some very smart folks on Council that are able to provide a lot of advice. As we sit here in this new building, that was the work of many hands, I want the public to know it was done for them. A government for the people and by the people must find ways to bring people together. Anything short of that is a collection of homes, and not a community. With our new community center, we can all interact and move our city forward. A lot has changed since President Lincoln brought forth the words of a government of the people, by the people and for the people, in his Gettysburg Address. Then, like now, there was a question on the future of America. I'm proud to say that I'm the Mayor of Streetsboro, a place where we still gather, and where multiple views are respected. It is sadly unique anymore and my job is to help preserve this wonderful city in an increasingly polarized time. My whole world is 25 square miles and there is nowhere I'd rather call home.

Thank you all for attending. May God Bless all of you and may God continue to bless the city of Streetsboro!