



State of the City

March 20, 2024



Good evening. It's a pleasure to be with you to give an update on the City of Mansfield. Tonight, I am going to share a look back at some of the successes of the last year, spotlight some of the fine work that our different departments have done, and also talk a little about my vision for the City as we move forward.

I'm 12 weeks, or 80 days, into my first term as your Mayor. The first three months have been a whirlwind of learning, connecting, meeting, and planning. I have had the pleasure of meeting so many dedicated City staff who go above and beyond each day to serve our residents. I have had the opportunity to meet with many concerned citizens who have called to share their ideas, plans, and thoughts about the future of the City of Mansfield. I have seen firsthand the pride that people have in their hometown of Mansfield – no matter if they were born and raised here, or transplanted.

And after 80 days, I'm pleased to share with you that this City – our City – is on the rise. While we have many challenges yet to face, there is great reason for optimism as we look at our collective future. I talked a lot last year during the campaign about my priority areas of Growth, Infrastructure, and Safety. I am going to structure the rest of this under those priority areas. For the sake of time, I'm going to highlight a handful of projects or updates under each area. However, I will have a more complete report available on the website soon.

I want to recognize the great work our City Department leaders did. While I have the opportunity to share these updates with you, this is the work of these great people and the teams that they lead. I know we have a few in the audience tonight. If you are a City department leader, can you please stand? Thank you for all the work you do day in and day out for our community. It's truly my honor to work alongside each of you. And now, on with the show....

Growth is our first priority area. Why is growth so important? Think of a tree. It starts as a seed and as long as it stays healthy, it continues to grow. It gets bigger, greener, and stronger bit by bit. The growth can happen quickly, and yet you can't sit and watch it take place in real time. Each year it produces new seeds that will fall and at least some of them begin to grow. One day, when the tree begins to wither and fade, if a new tree isn't coming up behind it, the forest will be left with a bare spot.

I look at communities in the same way. We cannot just count on the success of the past, because eventually that will start to tarnish and we will be left with gaps. We need new businesses creating new jobs, and new residents moving to town to continue our forward motion. That's the role of economic development, we aim to help those businesses come into a healthy environment where they can grow, and in turn give back to our community. This effort is led by Economic Development Director Tim Bowersock along with a partnership with the Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development, Team NEO and JobsOhio.

Last year, we were pleased to have Adena Development find a tenant for their spec building located at Airport West. This 160,000 square foot building was the largest industrial facility built in the City limits in a number of years. Hedstrom, the company who probably makes your child's favorite bouncy ball, has brought 35 new full-time jobs to our community as they expand. This project was a \$10,000,000 investment in our community.

Ohio Valley Stamping & Assemblies acquired the former Crestline Paint building located on Newman Street to accommodate their ongoing need to expand capacity to meet customer demand. This is the second consecutive year of expansion for them, and they project they will create an additional 20 jobs. This is a \$2,000,000 investment in our community.

Akron Children's Hospital with Adena Development, added a 10,000 square foot expansion to their site on Trimble Road to bring new mental health services and support for our youth. The project is

bringing 23 new full-time jobs and a project investment of over \$7,000,000 to the community, not to mention the vital expansion of support services.

Mansfield Lahm Regional Airport is an important part of our economic development activity. In 2020, Niss Aviation took over operations as our Fixed Base Operator. Since that time, they built a new hangar, added self-service fueling, and upgraded a number of other services. Last year they announced they would be rebuilding the restaurant at the Airport. Dubbed "The Sky Club" the project began with demolition of the former restaurant, and the new build will take place this year. This will be a great addition to the airport services.

Airport Manager Mark Daugherty oversaw a number of important infrastructure projects such as new pavements, a new Primary Wind Cone, and some important security upgrades. We know people are noticing all of these changes because Mansfield Lahm received the General Aviation Award from the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America, which is a national award. Congratulations to Mark and his team.

Under the leadership of Adrian Ackerman, our recently restructured Permitting and Development Department had an extremely busy year issuing 1,718 permits which represents over \$41 million in improvements throughout the City of Mansfield. I know first hand that 2024 is starting off very strong as well as we are seeing inquiries from new developers to our area.

Part of growth is attending to the first impressions we make as a community, something we have put even more attention to since January. Last year, our very dedicated Housing Inspectors issued 1,870 code violations across the City, and abated 275 properties for violations including mowing, junk removal, demolition and more. Long term, of course, we want to see these numbers eventually drop because people are taking better care of their properties. In the meantime, however, we are working to ensure we see some transformation begin.

Community Development saw the completion of the Phase 1 construction for the West End Target Area along Glessner Avenue. This project is revitalizing a strategic corridor leading to the County's largest employer, OhioHealth Hospital. Design contracts have been awarded for Phase 2 & 3 which will continue the upgrades further towards Main Street.

Making sure our residents have access to safe and affordable housing remains an important priority. The Turtle Creek Apartments were awarded \$600,000 in HOME-ARP funding to expand their footprint by 120 units beginning this year. We started on a down-payment assistance program which worked with 3 local first-time homebuyers, and completed 22 emergency housing rehabilitations – an increase from 2022. We want to build on that success – no pun intended – and continue to spur on housing development in our community at all income levels, something that is much needed as pointed out in the recent Countywide Housing Study.

Our second priority area is infrastructure. This is a word that is tossed around a lot these days. Oxford Dictionary defines it as the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (e.g. buildings, roads, power supplies) needed for the operation of a society or enterprise. If you go back to my tree analogy, think of infrastructure as the root and limb system of the tree. It is what everything else is built on. It connects the different parts of the community. It is the thing you never think about when it works right, but you notice right away when it is broken. In 2023, the City of Mansfield celebrated 215 years since its founding in 1808. That means in the oldest parts of town, our infrastructure dates back to well over a century, and even in the 'newer' parts, it is many decades old. Just like anything else, it needs to be maintained and upgraded on a regular basis.

Our City Engineer Bob Bianchi leads a robust program of regular improvements designed to enhance resident services and the community. Perhaps most familiar to people is our street program, which resurfaced 159 streets representing about 37 miles of roadway. What you may not realize is that when you see shovels going into the ground for a project, you're really only seeing the final stages of

something. Many of these large programs take years of planning to bring to fruition. That's one of the important roles our Engineering Department takes on for us, guiding these to completion.

Next year, we will see dirt being moved on the ambitious Main Street revitalization project, but in 2023 they completed important parts of the design and planning process. They have also secured 7 outside grants totaling a whopping \$12,734,442! That means between 80-85% of this whole project is being funded by grant dollars. You'll be hearing more soon about this exciting project, but kudos to the team for their fantastic work.

The B&O and Trimble Road Connector Trail and Tunnel is in the final stages of design and parts of it will begin construction later this year. This will connect the very popular bike trail to the south part of Mansfield through a natural conservancy area and bring more walkable areas online.

The Water Treatment Plant is in the final stages of a massive multi-year rehabilitation project which is providing essential updates to this vital service. The Plant, under the leadership of Leon Bursely Jr., pumped out 3.29 Billion gallons of safe, potable drinking water. We take for granted that water will come out of the tap when we turn it on, but we probably don't put a lot of thought into what goes into making that happen. Our Treatment Plant team stays busy with the 24/7 operation that is closely monitored by the EPA. Our laboratory performs tens of thousands of tests each year for a variety of factors ensuring that the water you drink is safe and clean.

Our Wastewater Treatment Plant, under the direction of Bob Coker, treated an average of 9.5 million gallons of wastewater per day, which is also closely monitored by the EPA. The Plant completed successful EPA audits on a number of their facilities and procedures. They also undertook important repair and maintenance on the engines and other equipment that ensures we can keep operating without interruption.

We have a very busy Service Complex which is made up of the Street, Water Repair, Sewer Repair, and Repair Garage Departments under the leadership of Steve Brown. This team works hard to respond to a multitude of needs. Let me give you a few stats to give you an idea:

- Filled 756 potholes
- Responded to 427 traffic signal calls
- Repaired/replaced 769 signs
- Completed 176 work orders regarding brush/weed removal
- The streetsweeper cleaned 1,150 miles of roadway and disposed of 266 TONS of road waste
- Fixed 94 water main leaks, repairing or replacing 107 water service lines
- Installed 114 water taps
- Completed a water main extension from Glessner to Distl Avenue area
- Responded to 588 sewer backup calls
- Cleaned/repared/replaced 482 catch basins throughout the city
- Replaced 514 ft of sanitary pipe and 1,289 of storm pipe
- And last but not least, the repair garage which fixes and maintains all of the many pieces of equipment that powers this and other departments completed 379 work orders for the year!

Our Utility Collections Department under the direction of Stephanie Samuel has taken steps to get the remaining water meters installed. This new administration is about to announce the change over in the billing process which will show the itemized charges, enhancements when it comes to how residents can pay their bills, as well as other things to make the customer experience more positive. We will get the water meter project done in the first half of the year and be able to move on from a project that has quite frankly taken too long. I appreciate the work that Director Andres is doing with Stephanie and her team to get progress that our residents have been asking for.

I heard from many residents throughout the campaign process about how much they wanted to see our parks improve. Of course, the Parks were closed entirely for 8 years during fiscal emergency so it has taken many years to begin to get caught up from that. We are working this year to make tangible improvements both large and small throughout the 22 different parks that the City owns. In 2023, Parks Superintendent Mark Abrams, and his team had a full calendar of recreational opportunities that they provided to the community. Everything from the drive-thru Easter candy, Bikeapalooza, and many different arts & crafts projects. They also made some hardscape improvements by fixes at Burton Park, North Lake Park, Liberty Park and Central Park.

We are excited to build on this momentum for 2024. Recently we announced new playground equipment that will be installed at Prospect and Maple Lake Parks. Our team has spent the winter months painting, fixing, and doing maintenance on our Park properties. We're currently in discussions with several groups who would like to partner with us to do different projects in some of our parks. I know there has been frustration, but I think there is a lot good momentum building and that residents will see many new things coming to fruition over the coming months.

Clearfork Reservoir is technically under our Water Fund since it is the source of so much of the City's water supply. But most of our residents know it as a wonderful recreational asset. Many people love to drive down there to watch the sunset and enjoy a little bit of peace and quiet. Scott Kotterman became the new Clearfork Supervisor in mid-2023 and he has hit the ground running. They have made improvements to the Marina restrooms, new signage, and improvements to the parking areas and pull offs. The docks and campsites were full in 2023, and it has become a popular location for Disc Golf Tournaments. Operation Shoreline has begun to improve shoreline fishing and prevent erosion. The City also completed a major project to the dam to ensure the continued sustainability for many years. 2024 is off to a busy start here as well with many additional upgrades and improvements being made to enhance the visitors experience.

Finally, our last – but equally important – priority area is Public Safety. One of the prime directives of any City, ensuring our resident's safety and security has become even more important with the uptick of violence that we have been experiencing as a community.

Our Division of Police, under the steady leadership of Former Chief Keith Porch, had 77 sworn officers and 40 civilian personnel in December 2023. They handled 30,739 calls for service. In response to the gun violence and gang activity we have seen, they formed the Community Action Team. This team consists of 5 officers and 1 supervisor who have received specialized training in handling these crimes. The team was able to bring 50 misdemeanors, and 58 felony cases to charge and conducted 40 search warrants. I know that our new Chief of Police, Jason Bammann, will ensure that we continue to have a highly trained and responsive force that operates with the utmost professionalism. Recruiting to fill all open positions remains objective #1. We have continued with some of the extra incentives to help encourage lateral transfers into the department, and while the progress has been slower than anyone would like to see, there are certainly signs of improvement.

I want to laud the Police Department for all they do to leverage our local tax dollars by being active and aggressive in going after grants to assist with funding personnel and projects. Because of this work, they have been able to upgrade many vehicles, add state of the art new equipment and support essential personnel.

Make no mistake, we are committed to changing the trajectory of violence from a cohesive standpoint and know that law enforcement plays a key role, but not the only role. Ensuring our children and youth have safe activities and options to stay busy will help them stay out of the way of those who mean to cause harm. We are committed to working with our schools, faith based and non-profit communities, and others to ensure that we are aligned in the work taking place in order to see a stark improvement over the current environment. We must work together; the next generation is counting on us to turn this tide.

2023 was a year of great transition for the Mansfield Fire Department. We saw the retirement of longtime Chief Steve Strickling, and our new Chief Dan Crow was sworn in in early December. This is a busy and active department which responded to 11,355 calls for service over the course of the year, with EMS calls being the majority. The change in the Chief has a ripple effect of other leadership changes as people have been promoted. We have a new Assistant Chief, EMS Medical Director, Training Captain, Fire Prevention Bureau Captain and HazMat Team Coordinator. Chief Crow has set an ambitious list of goals for 2024 which include developing a Strategic Plan with new Mission, Vision, and Core Values, developing a comprehensive training program that sets standards in core areas, strengthening Mutual Aid relationships with neighboring departments and more.

Of course, when we think of the response to violence, we often think first of our law enforcement, but our EMS personnel are equally impacted and important when responding to these situations. The Police and Fire Departments have improved joint response operations and are looking at other ways they can partner on to strengthen our safety response.

Underlying all the work of these departments I have highlighted our Maintenance Department led by Gary Utt Jr., Human Resources led by Sharon May, and IT led by Interim Director Mark Huckleberry. Each of these teams worked on many important projects that as a resident you may not experience, but were vital to improving the operations of the City. With approximately 460 employees, the City of Mansfield is a large and complex organization with many moving pieces and parts.

I have talked a lot about the idea of us being Team Mansfield. It has been a true pleasure to work alongside this City Council, our new Finance Director, Law Director, new Municipal Court Judges and the Clerk of Courts. Thank you all for your partnership, and willingness to align on these important topics.

But Team Mansfield is not just elected officials, or public employees. But you as residents, community members and businesses. We all have to be Team Mansfield. We all have to work together to make improvements to this amazing community. Do we have major challenges ahead? We sure do. I have yet to find a community that does not. But I am confident that we can and will prevail and see substantial improvements and growth. I am confident because of each of you that are on the Team. One thing I knew shortly after moving here 10 years ago was that people truly cared about this community and they were willing to roll up their sleeves and help where needed. Mansfield truly is rising. It is an honor to serve as your Mayor and I look forward to all that we will be able to accomplish together throughout 2024. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,
Mayor Jodie A. Perry