

2020 State of the City Address

Presentation - January 27, 2020

Welcome & Introductions

Council President Kip Greenhill

Good evening and welcome to our 2020 State of the City Address.

I hope you enjoyed the Community Fair and participated in the pop-up activities for the community center. If you missed it, on your program you will see an advertisement listing dates where the pop-up display will be taken out into the community to gather feedback from residents. The ad also lists other events and activities that will be used during this important phase of community engagement.

Pledge of Allegiance

Council President Kip Greenhill

Before we begin tonight's proceedings, please stand and join with me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Introductions

Council President Kip Greenhill

Some introductions are in order.

I am pleased to introduce my fellow Council members:

- Council Vice President Brendan King;
- Council Members Michaela Burriss, Brian Close, John Kulewicz, Jim Lynch, and Michele Hoyle.

Our thanks to all of you for the work that you do in support of Upper Arlington and the region.

Introduce Steve Schoeny

Kip Greenhill

Tonight marks the first State of the City Address from our new City Manager, Steve Schoeny.

Joining us in the fall, Steve didn't have far to travel since he already lives in UA. In fact, I think he's enjoying his new commute time, in place of his former role as Development Director for Columbus.

I know I speak for all on last year's Council when I say it was clear to us that Steve would be a great fit for the City, based on his professional experience, his energy, and his understanding of where we are and where we need to go.

Steve joins the Upper Arlington team at an exciting time. The signs of reinvestment are

everywhere—from our newly paved streets to the reinvestment occurring in our schools, neighborhoods and commercial districts.

But there's still plenty of work to be done, and we must be ever mindful of the changes that are happening around us. I am confident that Steve Schoeny will prove to be the leader we need at this time of unprecedented regional growth.

Please welcome Steve Schoeny...[APPLAUSE]

Steve Schoeny

Thank you, President Greenhill. Part of why I was so excited to take this job was the direction, but more importantly the tone that you and your colleagues on Council have set for this city. You all bring different perspectives, but you are guided by a sense of service, openness and the belief that we all succeed together.

Before I get into the meat of the evening, I have one housekeeping item. Tonight is the Jones-Hastings 8th Grade basketball game. My son, Nate, is playing. The game starts at 7:30. I am out of here, no matter what, by 7:15.

I am fortunate to have joined a City that is in a position of strength. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. I want to thank my predecessors, Rich King, Ginny Barney and Ted Staton for their leadership and service. They helped put in place the foundations that have prepared us for our next Century.

I also want to thank the whole leadership team—and especially Dan Ralley—for sticking together and serving the community without missing a beat through Ted's illness and passing. I am lucky to be part of your team.

Our community is strong not just because of those who are serving, but because of those who stand ready to serve. We are benefitting from that with our two new council members—Michaela Burriss and John Kulewicz. Welcome to you both.

We are in a position of strength thanks to a dedicated team of City staff who take the words **public service** to heart. They get the simple stuff right—our neighborhoods and parks are safe, our streets are in good repair, our trash gets taken away, we have clean water in our homes, we have easy access to the goods and amenities we need.

Organizational Excellence

It may sound like simple, basic stuff, but maintaining these services and facilities to the high standard we all want and deserve isn't so simple. Our team is not satisfied with the status quo. We are always revisiting how we operate, questioning what we can do better, looking for best practices and cost efficiencies.

I want to share with you some projects that demonstrate that organizational excellence is alive and well at the City.

2019 CITIZEN FINANCIAL REVIEW TASK FORCE

The 2014 version of the Citizen Financial Review Task Force made recommendations on how the City should expand its Capital Improvement Program while maintaining fiscal strength. One of those recommendations was to form a follow-up task force to gauge the City's progress and look for new areas of opportunity.

So, early in 2019, nine resident volunteers took another dive into the world of municipal finances. They concluded that the City had done its homework by implementing a majority of the 2014 recommendations, and we continue to be on a firm financial footing.

The new task force made several other recommendations, many of which have been implemented or are in progress.

AUDIT & REVIEW OF SAFETY FORCES

One such recommendation was to consider a performance audit of some internal functions, a process that is in its early stages. The City has contracted with the Auditor of State's Office to help us take a look at our IT operations, Fleet Maintenance and Purchasing procedures.

Another recommendation was to be more transparent and strategic in how we approach economic development. To that end, Council has allocated funds for an economic development strategic plan that we will be kicking off in the coming months.

This year we also plan to think about the structure of our Public Safety Department, the umbrella entity for our Police and Fire divisions. As we all know, both divisions provide exceptional service to our community. But like every other department at the City, a periodic review of how we compare to other agencies and considering national best practices can only make us stronger.

LEAN 6 SIGMA

In a city of our size, consultants are an important tool, but we are also building our capacity to innovate internally. We are equipping members of the organization with an invaluable skillset by undergoing Lean 6 Sigma training. By year's end, five members of our staff across multiple departments, including Public Service, Parks & Recreation, Human Resources, and the City Manager's Office, will be versed in critical thinking tools that help streamline organizational processes, saving time and money.

COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Few communities take community engagement as seriously as Upper Arlington. We have built a strong communications toolbox that can be ramped up or down to fit the needs of any given project, and that encourages and supports an engaged citizenry. Case in point, two recent online surveys tied to the Lane Avenue Planning Study yielded almost 3,000 responses.

Our mantra has become “meet our residents where they are.” Hopefully, you won’t just be seeing the City in your inbox or mailbox when we want to know your opinion, but you will be seeing us at events and at the grocery, too.

BRANDING AND NEW UA FLAG

In case you missed it, Upper Arlington turned 100 in 2018. As we closed the book on our first 100 years, our plans and hopes for the new Century ahead of us was coming into focus.

To mark this transition, the City rolled out a new logo and brand, with our popular community mascot—the Golden Bear—front and center. This includes a new City flag that is now available for residents to purchase.

We are putting our best foot forward into our second Century.

Rearview Mirror

While it may have been a year of transition for the City, Staff and Council, we didn’t rest on our heels. Significant progress was made to keep the City and the community moving forward.

INFRASTRUCTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Since 2014, the City has been aggressively focused on rebuilding our streets, and it’s making a difference. In the current 10-Year Capital Improvement Program, all curbs with a rating of 5—5 is bad—will be eliminated by 2022, and all curbs with a rating of 4 will be eliminated by 2024.

An added plus, our annual costs for major road projects will begin to level off to approximately \$2.2 million annually.

TIME LAPSE OF LANE II & CONSTRUCTION VALUE HISTORY

The numbers say it all. Year after year, construction values have been impressive—typically just shy of the \$100 million mark—but 2019 knocked all previous stats out of the park at over \$407 million.

This unprecedented statistic reflects the major projects for the UA Schools, the Lane II hotel and mixed-use project, and the Fairfax at First Community Village, as well as more than \$80 million in new homes and renovations.

Looking ahead, major redevelopment projects are already approved by BZAP or in the initial phases of review. I am confident that we will continue to see new opportunities, if we continue to plan well and aggressively pursue revenue producing projects.

ARTS & CULTURE MASTER PLAN

The arts enrich, educate and inspire, and they help define a community and its values. It’s no surprise that for 50-plus years, the arts have been alive and well in UA.

The Arts & Culture Master Plan was recently completed to ensure this legacy continues and evolves in future years. As we think ahead to what we want our community to be, this plan provides an inspirational guiding framework for exploring expanded public art opportunities in our commercial districts—Lane Avenue perhaps—and across the community. And it ensures that the programming and activities that have enriched lives for so many years, will continue for future generations.

DEVON POOL HOUSE

Improvements at Devon Pool have been breathing new life into the original aquatics facility in our portfolio. Most recently, the new pool house opened for business last summer, providing greatly enhanced changing and restroom facilities, concession stand, offices and more.

More upgrades at Devon are pending in the future—namely replacing the mechanical buildings and improvements to the toddler area.

TREE OF LIFE—PHOTO OF BUILDING

After an eight-year dispute process, the City prevailed in its efforts to preserve the property owned by Tree of Life Christian Schools for commercial use. In its former heyday as the CompuServe headquarters, the site generated approximately 35% of the City's annual income tax revenues.

While the City has done much to diversify UA's business, the property remains one of the largest parcels zoned for office use, and we are excited at the potential that lies ahead for Upper Arlington and the business community.

I want to take a minute to thank and recognize City Attorney Jeanine Hummer. First, I should say that Jeanine may be leaving with me at 7:15 with me, because her husband, Mark, and son, Andy, are my son's coaches. But, more importantly, Jeanine charted a path on this case that took us all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and victory. She has announced that she will be retiring in August, and this is Jeanine's final State of the City. She has been an amazing public servant. Please join me in giving her a round of applause.

Defining Our New Century

The possibilities that lie ahead for the Tree of Life property provide a perfect segue to how all in our community are collectively working to define our new Century.

HISTORY TRAIL

Our past is always part of our future. Several recently completed and proposed projects have featured signage of informational and historical value—the History Walk at Northam Park for our Centennial, the carriage step at Miller Park, and the ongoing plans in conjunction with Upper Arlington City Schools, to recognize former slave and landowner Pleasant Litchford.

As these projects evolved, the idea of establishing a formal history sign program has grown into a new project that the City is launching in partnership with the Upper Arlington Historical Society. An initial focus is to replace or repair some existing signs that are of historical significance, and to develop an interactive map and online tool that residents can refer to from their smartphones when they come across a History Trail sign.

From there, a formal selection process will be launched that seeks nominations for new signs from residents.

NORTHAM PARK UPGRADES AND PLAYGROUNDS

Progress has already been made to reinvest in our parks and in our recreation facilities, but more work will always remain to be done.

Two of our community parks will soon be home to new playgrounds—at Miller Park and Reed Road Park.

And we are now turning our focus to the remaining elements of Northam Park that are yet to receive upgrades. We are in the design phase for improvements to the athletic fields and tennis court complex.

Given the well-established nature of Northam Park and its existing uses, this project is not going to redesign or reprogram the park. Instead, our focus will be on infrastructure—such as drainage, restrooms, storage and shelters—that will allow us to have a park that is safe, resilient and appealing.

When you compare the condition and aesthetic appeal of the new Tremont Pool, playground and Centennial Plaza with the aging tennis courts and overused athletic fields, the difference is striking. I for one can't wait to see these facility upgrades completed, affirming Northam Park's place as our central community park.

LANE AVENUE PLANNING STUDY

We have experienced so much change within the Lane Avenue business district in recent years. When I moved to Chester Road nearly 14 years ago, there was, frankly, no energy on Lane Avenue. Today, we have new restaurants, established restaurants, residents, offices, a hotel, and there's more on the way.

The Lane Avenue Planning Study is taking a step back to consider how the City can support the district's evolution in a way that sets parameters **for thoughtful, quality development. We want to promote gathering spaces and enhance the pedestrian experience.** We want to improve safety and the look and feel of the district. All of this must be done while paying close attention to an appropriate blending between commercial activity and the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

I briefly touched on the high level of community engagement that's been occurring as this study progresses. To date, there have been more than 3,200 points of feedback.

The first round of engagement activities looked for general preferences and concerns from residents. In the second round, possible solutions were shared, the majority of which received positive feedback since they clearly reflect the input initially received.

Next up, the community will be invited back to learn about the final recommendations for enhancing gateways into the district, streetscape improvements and proposed amendments to the Lane Avenue Planned Mixed-Use District zoning requirements.

COMMUNITY CENTER FEASIBILITY TASK FORCE

So, if Lane Avenue is becoming the commercial heart of our City, do we need to build a focal point for the Community? Do we need create a Community Center?

Last summer, Council wrestled with this and determined that this is too important a question to be answered in a vacuum. They assembled a 16-member Community Center Feasibility Task Force—the CCFTF—with representatives from across our community.

At the most basic level, the CCFTF is seeking answers to three basic questions:

- What does a “Community Center” mean in Upper Arlington?
- Does the community want a Community Center? **and**
- Is there a viable business plan for a UA Community Center?

Defining and designing a Community Center cannot happen without input from the community.

Tonight marks the launch of an intensive phase of community engagement. Multiple “pop ups,” like the one in the Community Fair tonight, are being scheduled at events around town, meeting residents where they are. Focus groups and interviews are scheduled with representatives of stakeholder groups, like seniors, sports organizations, community groups and others. And by early Spring, it will be survey time.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CENTER? DO WE WANT A COMMUNITY CENTER?]

If we can define what a community center means for UA and the answer to the second question is “YES,” the study will transition to a second phase that drills into the details, such as what facilities to include, where a community center might be located, and the costs for construction, operations and ongoing maintenance.

Regardless of how funding a community might be structured, any proposal would come before voters at the appropriate time, upholding City Council’s pledge to residents that a Community Center will not move forward without going to the ballot.

I know I speak for Council members and all here at the City, when I salute the 16 members of the task force for taking this on. The issue is back on the table because of the feedback we have received from residents in recent years, and it is very fitting that the study be guided by residents.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Roads, sewers, new buildings, parks, office buildings, restaurants—bricks and sticks projects—are what we see. They REFLECT who we are, but they do not DEFINE who we are.

We define who we are by how we treat our neighbors. We define who we are by how we treat our guests.

And to some degree we are defined by how those who came before us treated our neighbors and our guests. I said earlier that our past is always part of our future. As was the case in many communities of generations past, in its earlier history Upper Arlington was welcoming to folks who look like me or come from the same faith as me, but was not welcoming to all. We were an “Exclusive” community when we thought that was something to celebrate.

Today, talented, educated, successful, caring, community oriented young people are actively seeking INCLUSIVE communities, and they shun communities that are perceived as rejecting anyone.

For Upper Arlington, inclusion isn’t just a moral imperative, it is a business imperative.

Let me be clear, I believe that the culture of Upper Arlington has changed fundamentally. The heart and soul of this community is welcoming to everyone. But we need to continue to deepen that change, to live it and to tell our story.

CATEGORIES – WELCOME, EDUCATE, GATHER

That is why we are forming the Community Relations Committee. With the active support of community groups such as Equal UA, The Stand Project, the Schools, and Leadership UA, City Council has charged us with creating a new Community Relations Committee that will work to deepen the culture of inclusion in UA.

This new Committee will work to further a set of simple but impactful goals that fall under the categories listed on the screen.

With care and attention, I am confident this effort will help us redefine Upper Arlington as a community that welcomes and embraces everyone. And I’m looking forward to being part of this transformational effort in the months ahead.

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

I want to close by thanking you for the honor of being the City Manager of Upper Arlington. I hope that my comments tonight have given you a sense of excitement about our direction and some ideas about where you want to participate in our future.

I hope that you will reach out to me with your ideas and suggestions. But you are going to have to email me or call me, because I gotta run. Go Bears.