

SLIDE 1 – State of the City of Battle Creek

Thank you for being here today. 2019 was an exceptional year in the City of Battle Creek.

We started the year with an unexpected budget shortfall after a loss of state reimbursements, became an All-America City for the first time in the middle and, at the end, made a historic trip to Japan, and hosted a historic visit from the President and Vice President of the United States. We have much to be proud of.

SLIDE 2 – Historic 2020

As we move ahead into 2020, many initiatives and projects will mark another historic year for Battle Creek.

For the first time since the 1960s, city voters will see a question on the ballot asking if they want to directly elect our mayor.

Our Fire Department and Police Department have established and continued programs that build relationships and better our community.

We continue to work with our community partners to find the best options for affordable and accessible housing. We are developing targeted approaches, and have more relationships than ever with housing developers.

So many economic development projects progressed in 2019, and we eagerly look forward to more progress in 2020. We expect to see more progress toward prosperity for our neighbors, and our entire community.

SLIDE 3 – Election – Blue Ribbon work

You may remember that, in 2018, the City Commission appointed a Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee to discuss our city charter, and consider making recommendations to us for changes.

As result of that work, followed by commission workshops and discussions, Battle Creek registered voters will see two related proposals on the March 10th primary election ballot.

The first will ask voters if we should remove all gendered language from the city charter, using pronouns like they and them, instead of he, she, him, and her. The commission believes this is the right thing to do in this modern time, to show better inclusivity in our language.

SLIDE 4 – Election – Mayor vote

The second proposal will ask voters if they want to elect the mayor as a separate office. Currently, the commission elects the mayor and vice mayor among ourselves during our annual organizational meeting.

If approved on March 10th, voters in the November 3rd election will elect five ward and three at-large commissioners, and one mayor. This keeps our total at nine commissioners.

Our current process has been in place since 1960, and the last time voters had the chance to vote on a similar proposal was in 1980. At that time, the proposal gave the mayor role to the at-large candidate with the most votes. Voters rejected that idea.

I believe it serves our community to give our voters the opportunity to give voice to the mayor's election. We improve our governmental system by ensuring we hear our neighbors' voices on issues important to them. With over 1,300 survey responses to the Blue Ribbon Advisory Committee on charter issues, we know they are important.

SLIDE 5 – Election – Please participate!

I will take this opportunity to encourage every person eligible to vote in Battle Creek to make sure you register, and vote your ballots in this important election year. This year you will vote for the president, various state leaders, your local City Commissioners, and our city proposals.

Some important changes this year make it even easier to do so. Anyone can vote using an absentee ballot – you no longer need a reason to do so. If you work on

Election Day, and it is inconvenient to get to your polling place on time, you can vote absentee. If you simply do not want to wait in line, you can vote absentee.

You also can register to vote up to, and on, Election Day. There are some restrictions there – if you register within 14 days of the election, it must be in person at the Clerk’s Office, with your identification and proof of address.

You can find much more information on voting and elections at the city’s website, battlecreekmi.gov/elections, or by calling the Clerk’s Office at 269-966-3348.

SLIDE 6 – Safety – Fire Department

A Feeling of Safety for Residents and Visitors is one of the city’s community results, related to the Priority Based Budgeting process. The results indicate why the City of Battle Creek operates, and the city received staff and community input to develop them.

Our Battle Creek Fire and Police Departments are two of the agencies most involved with creating safe conditions in the community, and these groups work incredibly hard to maintain top knowledge through training, and join community partners in the work of building relationships, and keeping our community strong.

Both departments attend training consistently, both across the country, and right here in Battle Creek, and attend a great variety of community events. These teams are approachable, and want neighbors to feel comfortable interacting with them.

The Battle Creek Fire Department began two excellent new programs in 2019.

Neighbors who live in the city limits always have the opportunity to call and request smoke detector installation, but the Fire team now is engaging in smoke detector blitzes, in neighborhoods that have experienced the trauma of a fatal fire.

In April, fire crews knocked on doors at 93 homes in the North Central neighborhood, after a fatal fire on Hamblin Avenue. They offered to install free smoke detectors for anyone who needed them, and answer any fire safety

questions, or left door hangers for those who were not home. Crews installed 54 alarms in that area.

Their goal is to educate the community, in this direct and engaged way, about the fact that smoke detectors save lives, reduce property damage, and make fire fighting safer for our crews.

The Fire Department also began focused work with Battle Creek Public Schools, joining firehouses with elementary schools to provide support, and build relationships. Already, city fire teammates have joined students as reading buddies, working on reading and writing skills that will help our students succeed. We look forward to watching this program grow, and starting a similar program with Lakeview Schools this year.

SLIDE 7 – Safety – Police Department

The Battle Creek Police Department also celebrated some important work and accomplishments in 2019.

The department's Edward J. Byrne Grant from the U.S. Department of Justice ended, and showed us some marked improvements in our neighborhoods. Named the Be Safe Battle Creek Initiative, a group of projects was implemented to improve neighborhoods, and improve relationships between neighbors, and between neighbors and police.

Officers were assigned to particular locations in Neighborhood Planning Councils 1 through 4, in northern parts of the city, which have experienced high crime numbers. Strategies to improve conditions included community outreach and engagement, like leadership training for neighbors, a community ambassador program, and neighborhood action plans.

Improvements include better lawn maintenance, giving the neighborhoods a better aesthetic and feeling, and significant improvements in neighbors' perceptions of their neighborhoods. Neighbors reported higher levels of neighborhood satisfaction at the end of the project, compared to the beginning, and a lower fear of crime.

The department also earned two exceptional accreditations, affirming their professionalism as a department, and a shining example for others.

In the spring, the department as a whole received accreditation from the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, one of only 19 in Michigan. This shows the BCPD voluntarily has met best practice standards, and complies with 105 association-required professional standards. This gives our police department great accountability, reduced risk, and more confidence in their ability to operate efficiently and respond to our community's needs.

More recently, the department's Forensic Science Unit – or crime lab – was awarded International Organization for Standardization accreditation. Our police department lab is one of three in Michigan to achieve this honor, along with the Michigan State Police and Oakland County labs. Similar to the full department accreditation, this shows our lab operates under quality policies and procedures, and that the lab team is technically competent and generates valid results. In addition, this gives our lab immense credibility in the courtroom, when they are needed as part of a case.

I am so proud of this work, and drive of our city teams to achieve such important recognition.

SLIDE 8 – Housing – Affordable/accessible

All of the city's analysis of the local housing market suggests that we need a greater variety of housing types, across multiple price points, and for varying income levels.

Along with housing affordability for our neighbors, we must consider that some neighbors have trouble accessing housing. Barriers affecting those neighbors include past evictions, criminal records, and the inability to save a first and last month's rent and security deposit. Because of this, we know some neighbors live in local shelters, in hotels and motels, or on the street.

City staff collaborate with agencies like Summit Pointe and the Calhoun County Homeless Coalition to address these issues, and make sure that neighbors who need housing can access the services they need, and for which they are eligible.

SLIDE 9 – Housing – Programs/strategies

The city, and our community agencies, are working together on a variety of programs and strategies to help our neighbors in need of housing assistance.

In this first quarter of 2020, city staff aim to bring to the commission a hotel/motel ordinance for consideration. This could provide more oversight, and we hope to use this ordinance to improve conditions at troubled hotels and motels in Battle Creek that make conditions even more inadequate for those living there because they cannot access other housing.

Our local 211 continues to be an excellent resource, and I encourage neighbors to call and explore the local services available. This phone number is a direct connection to Summit Pointe, and other agencies that can assist with housing, mental health services, food, prescriptions, household goods, child care, and so much more.

The city's Community Development team collaborates on this type of work, and is in the midst of the next five-year Consolidate Plan, a guide for how the city spends federal housing funds. One of the overarching goals in the 2020 to 2024 plan is "to ensure a safe, prosperous, and equitable community by creating strong, sustainable, and inclusive neighborhoods and quality affordable homes in Battle Creek." The priority within that goal is "affordable, accessible, and safe housing," which strengthens our community.

The city is considering innovative ideas, like the 20-minute Village and Purpose Built Community, which are used successfully in other communities. The 20-minute Village works on the idea that neighbors can meet all of their basic needs within a 20-minute walk. A Purpose Built Community helps build community wealth through neighborhood-based investments in education and housing.

Other work on the horizon is city staff continuing work to engage landlords in "second chance" rentals, helping remove the barriers some neighbors face to access housing; Legal Services of South Central Michigan helping with a variety of eviction situations; and some faith-based organizations analyzing an affordable housing location in Battle Creek.

SLIDE 10 – Housing – A look ahead

As we continue this important work in 2020, we are happy to see a heightened interest in the Southwest Michigan market for mixed-income housing, and tax credit projects.

The city currently is engaged with at least four different housing developers, looking to implement projects in Battle Creek that range from 100 percent permanent support housing, to market rate. We have more relationships with housing developers than ever, which gives city leaders great optimism that the community will experience positive change in 2020, and more housing options – one of our basic needs – for our neighbors.

SLIDE 11 – Economy – Japanese companies

I had the immense honor to visit Tokyo, Japan at the end of October, with our city manager, and with Joe Sobieralski of Battle Creek Unlimited. Battle Creek leaders were invited to apply for this opportunity, and accepted to participate. It was a wonderful chance to network with Japanese business organizations, and leaders at the DENSO headquarters, as well as inform our relationships with the Japanese neighbors who live in Battle Creek.

Battle Creek has had meaningful relationships with Japan for decades, both in our Sister City programs with Takasaki, and with the many Japanese business operating here. And Japanese companies in Battle Creek employ more people than any other Michigan community.

This trip was a proud moment for Battle Creek, and we look forward to continuing these important relationships.

SLIDE 12 – Economy – Small business

As many of you know, the city has made big strides to improve small business development, and get out of the way if processes are creating barriers to local businesses.

The Small Business Development team officially joined the city organization in 2019, and continues to play a critical role as a business liaison between business owners and regulatory staff.

This group is actively mapping our various commercial districts, community-wide, and is identifying needs and gaps in service, to facilitate improvements. They also engage business owners directly, through an aggressive retention program, which helps them identify and assist with addressing barriers to business growth.

The team provides ongoing technical assistance and innovative solutions to incubate small businesses. BC Cargo is a great example of that. We watched Café Rica, for example, serve the community in their BC Cargo shop, move to the incubator store front, the kitchen, on Michigan Avenue, and we look forward to the anticipated permanent location at 62 West Michigan. This most recent step will take place with the help of the \$200,000-plus Real Estate Improvement Fund Grant from Battle Creek Unlimited to JPG Resources.

In 2020, we can look forward to the Small Business Development Team's introduction of several new data tools, which will assist small businesses with informed decision making, growth, and development.

SLIDE 13 – Economy – Airport

2019 was a banner year for our Battle Creek Executive Airport at Kellogg Field, and we look forward to much more in 2020 and beyond. Please note the new name for the city's airport, a result of the rebranding recommendation from the airport's 2017 strategic business plan. This plan has helped the airport develop goals, objectives, and action plans to help promote and attract business and development to one of the most promising economic development assets in Battle Creek.

We are watching proudly as tenant expansions take place – Western Michigan University's College of Aviation is in the middle of a \$22 million expansion that administrators believe will increase enrollment from about 1,000 to 1,500 students. We eagerly welcome these students to our airport, and hope this work helps address national shortages of aircraft pilots and mechanics.

WACO Classic Aircraft is in the middle of an \$18 million expansion, which includes new hangars, and other facilities, including a new, second-floor restaurant. What a great opportunity to welcome neighbors and visitors to observe and enjoy the city's airport.

We anticipate more development opportunities to come, with available space on the west side of the airport property, and continued development of UAS, or unmanned aircraft systems, as drone technology advances.

SLIDE 14 – Economy – Prosperity

These efforts, and many more, will help bring greater prosperity to our neighbors, and our community as a whole. Battle Creek is seeing high numbers of people who are not participating in the workforce, and Battle Creek Unlimited and other partners are working on ways to address that issue.

I mentioned the Real Estate Improvement Fund grants, helping downtown projects move forward. The BC Vision movement continues, bringing leaders together from across the community to address jobs, education, and our culture of vitality. We have the transformation work of Battle Creek Public Schools, creating the support networks and environment our students need to succeed now, and once they graduate. And we continue the important work to improve the city's neighborhoods, and make them stronger. You will hear more in 2020 about pilot plans in small areas – starting on the Near North Side. The city is working with others in the community to improve housing and amenities in this area, then take the successes into other neighborhoods.

We look forward to progress in all of these areas. You can hear at the upcoming 2020 Economic Outlook, hosted each year by Battle Creek Unlimited. This free event will be on February 18th at Kellogg Arena.

SLIDE 15 – Questions?

Thank you to the Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event, to our City Manager, Rebecca Fleury, and to every city staff member who contributes to the great services and programs we provide to the community.

Thank you to our Calhoun County leaders for sharing their successes and updates, and thank you to all of you here in the room, and in the community watching later, for joining us today.

Please stay with us for an exceptional 2020 in Battle Creek.