



# State of the City

April 3, 2025



Good evening, I'm Mayor Jodie Perry and it's my honor to share with you the State of the City for 2025. Last year, I delivered this address in person prior to a City Council meeting. This year, I decided to go to a virtual event in part because of the construction currently happening on our Council Chambers and in part because more people would see it online. We should be back in our newly renovated space by early summer, but in the meantime, our Council meetings are still open to the public on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor in Courtroom 1 on the first & third Tuesday's of each month.

One of the most unique parts of serving as your Mayor, is the first-hand view I have on a daily basis of the many projects, developments, and activities happening that are moving our community forward. A day in the life of the Mayor could include planning for an upcoming infrastructure project, a phone call with a concerned resident, talking to local school kids, a meeting with a prospective new business, a City Council meeting, or even taking a call from the Police or Fire Chief about an incident that is happening. It is not only different every day, some days it is different *every* hour. That is one of the reasons that I enjoy serving in this role. Make no mistake, there are many tough decisions and difficult moments, but when we have the chance to make a positive change in the community, those are the best days! 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. As I look back over the last 15 months since I took office, I am so encouraged by the changes that we have seen and I firmly believe it is just the promise of even better things ahead.

The State of the City of Mansfield is **STRENGTHENING**. We are a City on the cusp of great opportunity. We are a City seeing the first fruits of major changes that will strengthen us even more. While it is true that we have many challenges yet to face, my first 15 months as Mayor has confirmed for me that there is great reason for optimism as we look at our collective future.

Growth, Infrastructure and Safety remain the top priorities that we are working towards. We talk about our work centered around these goals on a regular basis with our departmental leaders and fellow City elected officials. One thing I learned quickly is that in order to make progress in these strategic areas, we would need the assistance and leadership of our other local elected officials. From our Finance Director, Law Director and City Council members to our Municipal Court officials, county leaders and beyond, we are trying to work together as a team whenever possible to effect changes in areas that were long overdue for them. I appreciate all of the work that we have done together and their commitment to bringing positive change.

I also want to recognize the great work our City Department leaders do each and every day. While I have the opportunity to share these updates with you, this is the work of these fine people and their teams. Whether they lead a handful of people or many dozens, they do the work with great integrity and dedication. They are on the front lines of everything we do, and I want to thank them for all the work they do day in and day out for our community. It's truly my honor to work alongside each of you.

I know that one of the most important decisions any leader makes is the team with which they surround themselves. As I came into this position, I spent a lot of time thinking about the type of administration I wanted to have. I needed leaders who were knowledgeable in areas that I was not. That would be honest with me about their opinions on decisions we had to make even when it differed from mine. That would treat our employees, residents, and businesses with respect at all times, and be able to be transparent and communicative. I could not be more pleased with our new Safety Service Director Keith Porch and Public Works Director Louis Andres. Between them they have over 70 years of public service experience at different levels of government. They have each taken on areas that were familiar to them and areas that were completely new and have served with strong dedication and perseverance. I'm so grateful for their leadership, and support. And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the administrative support provided by Tina Germann and Julie Shoup to our team, as well as the decades of work provided by the now-retired Marlene Skowronski.

Now... hold tight...because we are about to take a fast-paced ride through 15 different departments, dozens and dozens of finished projects, talk about the amazing work of the 465 employees of the City of Mansfield, and give you a glimpse of what is on tap for the rest of 2025.

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.

In 2024, we took some solid steps forward in terms of economic development. After the retirement of our longtime economic development director, we formed a new partnership with the Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development to serve as our chief ambassador for growth. With Ellen Heinz, Barrett Thomas, and the other Chamber staff, we are already off to a strong start in terms of helping local businesses grow or relocate here.

A few projects I would like to highlight include a new manufacturing location for Adena – NCF. This investment will add at least 10 new jobs and represents millions of capital expansion dollars. Eaglemark 4 opened their new location in the old foundry property. They have rapidly expanded to over 80 local employees and invested significant money in improving that facility. Schmidt Security Pro is finalizing a second building on their property on Harrington Memorial Pkwy, adding new jobs and millions in investment.

Adena Development announced that they would begin building their second spec manufacturing building at Airport West in 2025. Why is this important? Businesses looking to relocate often base their decisions on three factors, speed to market, lowest risk, and lowest investment cost. Having a building that is 90% ready to go will positively impact all of those

factors. We appreciate this strong investment by Adena and look forward to welcoming a new business to locate there in the next year or so!

Last year, Westbrook Country Club finished up a huge multi-million dollar expansion which saw completely new dining facilities, pro shop, gym areas, event space and much more come online. That is just the start of the investment on that property as the Niss family continues work to transform the former Lumbermen's Insurance campus into condominiums and event space.

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 took down the former restaurant facility in preparation for building a new restaurant called "The Sky Club" which will begin building this summer. We have a dedicated flight school at the airport named AVIT Flight Academy, who has been very busy with new pilots in the area.

Airport Manager Mark Daugherty and his team worked on a lot of planning activities throughout the year including design work for a resurfacing project on runway 14/32 that will take place this year. Pierce Aerospace installed a new drone detection system on the decommissioned radar tower site to increase security in the area. They also worked with partners to host another successful Airport Day in early August with a well-attended drone show at the end of the evening.

Another good indicator of burgeoning economic development is the strong growth in building permits. Under the leadership of Adrian Ackerman, our Permitting and Development Department had an extremely busy year issuing 718 building permits which is an increase of nearly 50% over 2023. They also performed over 1,000 permit inspections – also a significant increase over previous years.

Part of growth is attending to the first impressions we make as a community, something this administration is focusing on. Last year, our very dedicated Housing Inspectors issued 2,432 code violations across the City, ordered mowing on 335 properties, and city crews completed 224 clean-up and board-up orders on blighted properties. 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. We will soon be introducing legislation for a property maintenance code, which will give us greater options to enforce better property management to help protect your investment as homeowners and taxpayers.

Community Development started the design and engineering work for Phases 2 & 3 of the West End Target Area along Glessner Avenue. This project is revitalizing a strategic corridor leading to the County's largest employer, OhioHealth Hospital. Community Development Block Grant funds were allocated to support 6 local agencies and programs such as the Summer Kids Program in the Parks. We also helped with emergency home repairs for low-income residents and down payment assistance.

Housing expansion is beginning to blossom. We saw several projects begin last year including Phase 5 of the Tower Lakes development, the Walker Woods development off Home Road, Brushwood Estates, and the Silver Birch senior living facility on Cline Avenue. In

partnership with the Richland County Foundation we also awarded incentives to developers for new downtown apartments in the brownstones on E. Third Street, and Famico's Place in the former Webb's Grocery at the corner of Mulberry & W. Fifth Street.

Our second priority area is infrastructure. This is a word that is tossed around a lot these days. 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 2024, the City of Mansfield celebrated 216 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 103 streets and alleys representing about 19 miles of roadway. Additionally, they completed a traffic signal upgrade at Marion & Maple which has brought about a greatly improved functioning of this unique 5-way intersection. 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.

We are in the midst of a major upgrade to our local bike/walk trail system. Trail systems are vital for communities, offering benefits like improved health, economic growth, and enhanced quality of life by providing safe and accessible spaces for recreation, transportation, and community engagement. In 2024, we completed the first phase of this which was a tunnel connecting the Cook/Trimble Road trail under the 4 lane roadway. This year, we will be building the connection piece from the tunnel to the B&O Bike Trail, as well as along Millsboro from Trimble to Marion. This will make it easier for users of the bike trail to connect with the south side of Mansfield. We are also building the Park View Trail along the north side from North Lake Park through Middle & South Parks to Maple Lake Park.

In March, voters passed a new ¼% income tax dedicated to replacing our old water mains and fixing hundreds of non-working fire hydrants. The Engineering office jumped into action right away beginning the design work for the first year of the program. Next month we will begin the first significant replacements of water mains in decades and work will take place all throughout the City.

Of course, the star of the show here is the massive Main Street revitalization project which kicked off construction last month after 6 years of planning. Rebuilding the so-called 'front door' of the community was a top recommendation of the Mansfield Rising Plan. Working in conjunction with Downtown Mansfield, the Chamber and others, our Engineering team secured 9 grants totaling \$15.1 million dollars to minimize the impact to local taxpayers. This video will give you an idea of just how transformational this project will be. I am so excited seeing this work get underway after so many years of planning, and I know it will drive further investment in our downtown.

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. New pumps, tanks, and other equipment are being installed with this project which will keep the plant operating for another 50 years. The Plant, under the leadership of Leon Bursely Jr., pumped out 3.36 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 performed 56,940 tests last 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 9.1 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. In addition to the plant, this team manages 17 lift stations throughout the community. They also undertook important repair and maintenance on different equipment that ensures we can keep operating without interruption.

We have a very busy Service Complex which is made up of the Streets, 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 717 potholes
- Responded to 180 traffic signal calls
- Repaired/replaced 617 signs
- Responded to over 2,000 public requests for service
- The streetsweeper cleaned 925 miles of roadway and disposed of 135 TONS of road waste
- Plowed and salted over 660 miles of public roads.
- Fixed 120 water main leaks
- Installed 36 new water taps
- Responded to 135 requests for fire hydrant maintenance
- Responded to over 500 sewer backup calls
- Cleaned/repaired/replaced over 200 storm catch basins
- 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 507 work orders for the year!

Our Utility Collections Department under the direction of Stephanie Samuel has taken significant steps forward in 2024. We were able to get the itemized charges to show on the bill, something which had been promised for years. Earlier this year, we also completed the transition to measuring in gallons, another objective which had been talked about for years. Soon we will have a new customer portal available so that you can look at your water usage in real time, and we are also looking at improved options for bill payment. I appreciate the work that Stephanie and her team are doing to get progress that our residents have been asking for.

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 is the Clearfork Supervisor and since taking over in late 2023, he has worked with his team on significant improvements. They have made improvements to the Marina restrooms, new signage, and parking areas and pull offs. The docks and campsites were full in 2024, and it has become a popular location for Disc Golf Tournaments and fishing tournaments. Operation Spillway began to remove 75 years of overgrowth and silt in the spillway plunge pool. This will prevent erosion and maintain conservation in downstream habitats. 2025 is off to a busy start here as well with many additional upgrades and improvements being made to enhance the visitors experience.

One of the areas that generated a lot of buzz in the community was our City Parks. Coming into this role, I heard from many residents 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. The City owns 22 different parks, and in 2024 our Parks crews under the supervision of superintendent Mark Abrams completed a whopping 88 different projects in 12 parks. Some of these are large projects such as the new playground equipment at Prospect & Maple Lake Parks, and some were smaller projects such as installing/fixing benches, adding dog waste stations and adding new signage.

With decades of experience in parks management, Public Works Director Andres has worked closely with our crews to help bring new enthusiasm, knowledge, and pride to the important work they do. We also worked hard to expand recreational opportunities that they provide to the community. Everything from the drive-thru Easter candy, Bikeapalooza, Summer Kids Program, and many different arts & crafts projects.

Another essential element in the momentum we are seeing in the parks is the strong community partnerships we have seen. Sterkel Park has been completely transformed thanks in large part to the work of Richland Newhope and the generosity of private donors, and public partners such as Richland County and the State of Ohio. While the grand opening will be held in May, the large majority of the work was completed throughout 2024. If you have not had a chance to visit this park yet, you will be blown away by the extensive investment that has been made.

Liberty Park is another area that is seeing new energy thanks to the work of many local individuals and groups. A new basketball court was unveiled in July thanks to the generosity of Coca Cola Consolidated. The baseball field was revitalized in partnership with Madison Schools. Rewild Liberty has done extensive plantings along the stream and other work. The Liberty DIY Skate Park continued their work to add new features for local skateboarders. The Friends of Liberty Park and two local VFW Posts helped rebuild the historic flagpole. Mansfield Baptist Temple built a new pedestrian footbridge. The road was resurfaced, the culvert replaced, and City crews poured new cement walkways. The beautiful historic sandstone was restored on the former bathhouse and bridge. In an innovative partnership, career tech students from Mansfield City and Madison helped to demo the inside of the bathhouse in preparation for renovations to make it a pavilion space thanks to grants we have received from Richland County Foundation and the Milliron Foundation.

Richland Public Health has helped to add many new amenities in our park system, and the Mansfield-Richland Public Library helped us create the Storybook Trail at South Park.

And there is more to come! Projects at King Street, Johns, Middle, Prospect, and Maple Lake Parks are on tap for 2025. I am always excited when a resident stops to say how much they appreciate all the work we are doing in the parks. I am glad to know that people are seeing the transformation, and am so proud of our team for how hard they have worked throughout the last year to make this change.

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 is an essential factor in our ability to grow as a community. I took office as we were finishing a year that had seen a significant increase of violence. While this trend was also seen in hundreds of other cities across the country, we knew that we needed to work collectively to change that trajectory for the future.

When Keith Porch became our Safety Service Director, I had the chance to name a new Police Chief. Jason Bammann was sworn in as Chief in March, and Mike Napier became Assistant Chief in April. That also set off a number of promotions and changes at all levels of the department. One of the areas that we knew we had to continue to work on was recruitment. The City, like so many other law enforcement departments across the country, had been understaffed for several years. We were able to have a net gain of 5 officers in 2024 for a total of 82 sworn officers and 39 civilian personnel in December 2024. As you can imagine, the process to become an officer is quite extensive with testing, physical testing, background checks and training. It is slow and methodical work to build up your numbers, and I am so thankful to the team in the Police Department who works on recruiting every day. We are making significant progress with personnel levels which allows us to do more things like community policing, specialized bureaus, and more.

In 2024, Police handled 30,186 calls for service, and made 3,336 arrests. I'm pleased to report that Part 1 crimes, the most serious ones, saw an overall decline of 20%. The Detective Bureau investigated 369 cases and along with the crime lab, was able to solve a 40-year-old cold case. In response to the gun violence we have seen, a couple years ago the Police formed the Community Action Team consisting of 5 officers and 1 supervisor who have received specialized training in handling these crimes. The team was able to bring 90 misdemeanor arrests, 141 felony cases to charge, and conducted 31 search warrants.

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. One of those projects that was completed was the "Shoot House" which is providing unique training to both local and statewide law enforcement to aid in their response to live shooter situations.

Also under the Division of Police, is our 911 dispatch team. Under the leadership of Mark Huckleberry, they were the ones taking those tens of thousands of calls for service for both police and fire response. In 2024, they went live with a new computer aided dispatch system which when fully implemented will improve response to emergency situations. In 2025, we will begin a one-year test of a drone response program, which will allow dispatchers to send a drone to certain emergency situations to provide key information to our first responders.

While I was pleased to see the improvement in our violent crime statistics, even one death is too much. We remain 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 continue to work 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. Programs like the ACE Program, PAL Sports, Safety Town, and the mentoring program, are an important part of the Police Department as we work to make a positive impact on this next generation. To the community I say this, it is incumbent on all of us to work together to turn this tide for the next generation.

Safety is more than just law enforcement, it is also emergency response. With our new Fire Chief Dan Crow, the Mansfield Fire Department made many strides forward in 2024. This is a busy and active department which responded to 11,895 calls for service over the course of the year, with EMS making up over 10,000 of those calls. We saw the retirement of 6 long-serving members, swore in 5 new firefighters, and had 9 promotions. The department worked with community stakeholders to create their first Strategic Plan, and new Mission, Vision, and Core Values. They implemented the MARCS radio system which significantly enhanced communication reliability and operational coordination. They also developed a comprehensive training program that sets standards in core areas, and received grants for essential fire officer training that is taking place throughout 2025. Chief Crow worked on strengthening Mutual Aid relationships with neighboring departments and is continuing to look at ways to enhance that this year.

The Fire Department also supports the community in a variety of ways from helping to replace smoke detectors, ensuring a strong Fire Prevention program of activities, and even had some fun running their hoses at local parks during the sweltering days of the summer. We appreciate their work and dedication to serving our residents.

The City of Mansfield is a large and complex organization with many moving pieces and parts, underlying all the work of these departments I have highlighted are the internal service departments. 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. Our Maintenance team, led by Gary Utt Jr., completed several important building and maintenance projects. One of the most talked about were improvements to the front of the building along N. Diamond Street. From painting, power washing, and other touch ups, the 'front door' of the city shined brighter last year. We also kicked off a multi-million-dollar renovation of our nearly 50-year-old City Hall facility. Pardon our dust as we work through that this year, but it is bringing important upgrades in accessibility, efficiency and maintenance.

The Human Resources team, led by Sharon May, worked on hiring for dozens of positions of all varieties, reviews of employee benefits, and updates to personnel policies. We have 465 employees and every day is busy as we work in conjunction with our bargaining units to ensure a strong, trained, and dedicated workforce. HR also helps with procurement, and they assisted with 26 contract bids, purchasing dozens of pieces of equipment, and the sale of close to \$100,000 of assets which were no longer needed on GovDeals.

We saw significant changes in our IT Department, as Mark Huckleberry became the new Chief Technology Officer. We made critical upgrades to our network security and technology infrastructure. Our team answered over 4,000 tickets for trouble, installed over 120 new devices and navigated many changes in technology with ease. I am so appreciative of their work as they are the backbone of the technology we use every day to continue to serve our residents.

One of the areas that I have worked hard to improve upon is communication. In terms of social media, we revitalized the City of Mansfield Facebook page growing to over 6,000 followers, with a reach of over 630,000 and over 46,000 interactions. I created my Mayor's Facebook page as well which added another 3,200 followers, reaching 224,000 people, and generating 56,300 interactions. It has allowed us to keep you updated throughout the year on the many things that are happening in Mansfield.

We embraced the new community brand, and have taken steps to implement it throughout the City. From new markings on our City vehicles, to new wayfinding signage that you will begin seeing throughout the City in 2025, we know that this will help give a more cohesive impression to our area.

Some of the steps we have taken have generated a lot of feedback, such as the anti-cruising ordinance and speed bumps aimed at eliminating the racing and other challenges happening along the Miracle Mile. And after extensive debate, City Council approved cannabis dispensaries with a limit of 3. The first two of which will open later this year.

2024 even brought some historic happenings such as the total solar eclipse in April, which was certainly one of the coolest natural phenomenon I have ever experienced. We got a glimpse of the Aurora Borealis on two different occasions and saw a comet trail through the sky for the first time since the dinosaurs. And don't forget the Shawshank Redemption 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and rocking out at the ever popular Inkarceration.

It has been a true pleasure to work alongside our City Council members – President Phil Scott, Laura Burns, Cheryl Meier, Rev. El Ackuchie, Cynthia Daley, Aurelio Diaz, Deborah Mount, David Falquette and Shari Robertson. My fellow citywide elected officials Finance Director Kelly Blankenship, Law Director Rollie Harper, Municipal Court Judges Michael Kemerer and David Badnell, and the Clerk of Courts Dan Smith have worked closely with our administration at all times. Thanks to you all for your partnership, and willingness to align on these important topics.

I have talked a lot about the idea of "Team Mansfield." What do I mean by this? In this day and age, Mansfield is not just competing locally, regionally, or even nationally. We are competing on a global stage for development and growth. Team Mansfield is the idea that we all have a role to play to make our community successful. Find your passion, and plug into the work that is being done. Participate in community clean ups, coach kids sports teams, meet your neighbors, say nice things about our community. There are a thousand ways for you to give back.

Most certainly, we will not all always agree on everything...one quick look at social media will remind you of that. But we all have to be on Team Mansfield. We all have to work together to make improvements to this amazing community. Do we have major challenges ahead? Absolutely! I have yet to find a community that does not. We aren't going back to the way things used to be, we are forging a new path for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We honor our history, but

embrace the fact that our future success depends on the work that we are collectively doing together. 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.

Mansfield is my adopted hometown. I fell in love with this community shortly after I moved here 11 years ago. I am so humbled and honored to serve as your Mayor and I look forward to all that we will be able to accomplish together throughout 2025. The State of our City is Strengthening each and every day. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted,  
Mayor Jodie A. Perry