

# **CITY OF GREENWOOD**

## **MAYOR MARK W. MYERS**

### **2021 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

Thank you for coming today, and thank you to everyone joining us online. I am continuously humbled by the commitment and dedication of my fellow citizens. I'm also so glad to be here, in person, to share this experience with all of you.

Thank you to my wife, Stacie, for your continued support and to my mother and sisters who attend almost every one of these events.

I want to thank my children as well and could not be more proud of all them. They're all watching online today. Thank you all so much for your support. You have no idea how much you inspire me to do my very best every day.

I would also like to thank Christian Maslowski, John Sturm, The Nest and Aspire Economic Development & Chamber Alliance for hosting today.

I want to recognize all Common Councilors in attendance, as well as the members of our City Boards and Commissions, and other elected officials here today. If you would please stand and be recognized.

Will our department heads and city employees please stand. All of you deserve as much recognition as anyone for all we've been able to accomplish during the past nine years. Thank you for your hard work and continued dedication to our city.

I last gave this speech on February 6, 2020. Greenwood's economy was humming. We were experiencing a period of sustained success with an even brighter future ahead. Who could have thought that less than two months later, COVID-19 would be a national emergency and inflict what has now been 15 months of unimaginable pain.

Lives lost. Businesses shuttered. Extended periods of social isolation.

We've been through so much, I find it hard to appropriately describe it all. How can we begin to understand the toll taken from losing a loved one? How can we know what it's like to put your entire life into a business, only to have it close for reasons beyond your control? What is it like to go days, weeks and months without human contact?

The short answer is that we will never truly know. Our country and its communities will likely feel the aftershocks of this pandemic for years to come.

Thankfully, we've worked hard to position Greenwood for success, which includes the ability to weather times of difficulty or uncertainty. We are not out of the woods just yet, but I am happy to report our city is emerging even stronger than before.

Last fall, we opened a world-class park that will anchor Greenwood's downtown for generations to come. Old City Park has instantly become a top destination for residents and visitors of all ages, and it seems like every time I drive by, the place is packed.

Last month, we welcomed yet another internationally known company to our community. Standing with Governor Holcomb and leaders from Milwaukee Tool, we discussed how the company planned to hire 450 people in the next four years. In less than two months, they're already more than a quarter of the way there.

Earlier this year, Common Councilors approved redevelopment plans for the former Greenwood Middle School property, which includes nearly \$70 million in private investment.

Trust me folks, no one invests \$70 million without a strong expectation of realizing a good return on that investment. The smart money is on Greenwood. Businesses and economic development professionals are proving that fact every day.

Our success didn't happen by accident or chance. When we take PRIDE in our city, the possibilities for PROGRESS are endless.

PRIDE and PROGRESS.

Our city's motto has served us well since 1864, and it seems to become more relevant each day as Greenwood leads the south side's continued resurgence. We've proven once again that Greenwood can overcome any hurdle, no matter how high.

Your collective will to better Greenwood...the people in this room, folks watching online, and every one of our fellow residents...your shared will drives our community's success, and I thank you all for your strength, devotion and perseverance.

Let's begin with city finances. As most of you know, I like to start things off by going straight to Greenwood's bottom line.

To think about the financial state of our community when I first gave this speech in 2012, and the trajectory we're on now, the contrast is remarkable.

Less than a decade ago, our financial prognosis was grim. Today, Greenwood's fiscal position is the envy of municipalities across Indiana, with a balanced budget, cash reserves and an excellent credit rating.

For the ninth straight year, we presented Common Council with a balanced budget, which they adopted. I'm proud to announce that for the seventh year in a row, our Finance Department is being honored with a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence

in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association, making Greenwood one of only a handful of cities in Indiana that can make that statement.

Now, this is typically where I remind everyone that Greenwood has Indiana's fourth lowest tax rate, a rate that hasn't changed since I took office.

Well, I have to admit, that's no longer the case. When working with our financial consultant for a recent presentation to the Common Council, he informed me Greenwood's tax rate has indeed changed...it's gone down.

If you'd like to see the details for yourself, I encourage you to visit the city's website where we post all financial data, making it as accessible and digestible as possible. Financial transparency has been a hallmark of this administration, and that will continue for as long as I am mayor.

Conservative spending and sound management allow us to keep taxes low while responsibly investing in the things important to all of us.

When it comes to public investment, I believe there are four pillars to ensuring Greenwood's position as a model city: Public Safety, Infrastructure, Quality of Life and Economic Development. Effective execution in these four areas position our community for success, both now and in the future.

Let's look at these four pillars and the role each plays toward creating Greenwood's competitive advantage.

The first is Public Safety.

Before becoming Mayor, my professional experience focused primarily on law enforcement and public safety, and I'm proud to continue serving as a Reserve Deputy for the Johnson County Sheriff's Office.

I believe that first and foremost, Greenwood must be safe. Safe for our residents, safe for our growing number of visitors and safe for the businesses driving our economy.

Greenwood is blessed to have men and women in both our police and fire departments who share this conviction and are committed to doing whatever it takes to protect and serve our community. Their dedication serves as an example to us all.

To the heroes who work to keep Greenwood safe every day, thank you for everything you do and the many sacrifices you make.

Between the pandemic and social unrest throughout the country, the past year has been extremely challenging for all police and fire departments, and I must commend Greenwood Police and Fire's thoughtful approaches and successful outcomes.

Early on during the pandemic, the departments quickly implemented a number of safeguards for employees, including mask wearing, daily temperature checks, repetitive cleaning of work stations, and practicing recommended social distancing.

These protocols allowed our public safety personnel to continue providing the highest levels of service to residents, including late last year when several firefighters and nearly a third of our police officers were infected with COVID. Our folks pulled together, volunteered to cover shifts for their sick co-workers, and made sure staffing was always adequate.

Last June offered an additional challenge, and once again, our people rose to the occasion.

Following the death of George Floyd, civil unrest erupted in cities across the United States. Downtown Indianapolis suffered multiple nights of rioting and vandalism. Greenwood, and specifically the Greenwood Park Mall, were named as future targets for rioting on social media.

The Greenwood Police Department, in collaboration with the Johnson County Sheriff's Office, Indiana State Police, U.S. Marshall Service, and Simon Properties, developed and executed a strategic, detailed response plan. The strategy worked exactly as intended. Those responsible for the threats were arrested, and absolutely no rioting occurred in Greenwood.

I think that deserves another round of applause. Great work, folks.

While we were diligent about preventing violence and vandalism in our city, we also recognized the importance of current conversations about policing and the need to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the citizens they bravely protect and serve.

And so we began a comprehensive examination and overhaul of current GPD policies. Working with a national expert in the field, the updated policies will represent best practices for law enforcement and align with all current state and federal laws. The process should be completed later this summer.

GPD is also improving its technology with new software capable of extracting data directly from its records management system and producing valuable reports documenting when and where crimes are being committed and predicting when and where future crimes are likely to occur. The software and first three years of service are being funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

And while the police department had to delay a new round of hiring due to the pandemic, we plan to bring on eight more police officers in 2021.

Greenwood Fire Department was able to continue its hiring through the pandemic and welcomed six new firefighters last year.

Last July, the department opened its newest facility, Station 93 on West Cutsinger Rd. If you visited the previous Station 93, you'd know it was long overdue for replacement.

Upgraded facilities are important, but we must also remain focused on growing our number of firefighters. We plan to hire another 12 people this year, and I will continue to collaborate with Common Councilors to address staffing of both firefighters and police officers in future city budgets.

Our next pillar is Infrastructure.

From sewers and stormwater drains to roads, sidewalks and waterways, infrastructure is the most important community issue that too often gets the least appropriate amount of attention. Given Greenwood's recent and future growth, we must dedicate particular focus and strategic investment toward critical public assets.

Our administration is paving more roads, adding miles of trails and nearing completion on the Western Regional Interceptor, the largest public works project in Greenwood's history. We're upgrading technology across the board and making sure our rivers, streams and waterways are clean and healthy.

I want to start by talking about our new Department of Public Works building, located on South Washington Street. The new 61,000 square-foot building houses administrative offices for Greenwood's Sanitary Sewer and Stormwater Utilities, Street Department, Parks Maintenance Divisions, and Vehicle Fleet Maintenance.

With multiple drive-thru bays, centralized fluid and air compression, a modernized water quality lab, welding shop, sign fabrication shop and integrated wash bay, the new DPW facility creates significant efficiencies for city employees and infrastructure operations.

I am proud to again highlight that Greenwood paid for construction of the DPW building with cash on hand and did not issue a single dollar of debt for the project.

It's one more example of what our city can achieve with a strong financial position.

Our financial strength allows for continued additions to Greenwood's trail system as well. In 2020, we began construction on phase three of the Madison Avenue transformation. We're taking the widened sidewalks, bicycle lane and streetscape enhancements north all the way to Fry Road.

Earlier this month, the Parks Board approved a contract for a new trail between Northwest Park and Northwest Park Annex. Construction on that project will start later this year.

Coinciding with these efforts, the Parks Department is finalizing a new master plan for Greenwood's trail system, including new trails, additional connectivity of existing trails, and opportunities for various community partnerships.

Our Street Department emphasizes walkability projects as well. In 2020, the department oversaw an effort to raise and level 367 sections of sidewalks, eliminating thousands of trip hazards throughout multiple neighborhoods. The department also installed several new handicap ramps around the city and poured more than 2,400 feet of new sidewalk.

And while we continue to make Greenwood a more walkable community, we must not neglect the infrastructure supporting our primary form of transportation: roads.

In 2020 and throughout this year, Greenwood has continued its emphasis on design, reconstruction and paving of our city's roads. Our administration takes an approach focused on maximizing available state and federal funding, which allows us to do more projects at a much quicker pace.

We continue our expansion of Worthsville Road as a future east-west connector providing residents and area businesses with improved access to interstates and major county and state roads.

I know we've had some recent issues with utilities, delayed construction and unexpected closures...

and trust me, if I could get out there and move dirt myself, I'd do it...

What I can say is the inconvenience will be worth the end result. This is about laying the groundwork for future growth and sustainability, and the impact of this project will be seen for years to come.

Turning to Greenwood's Sanitary Sewer utility, the city continues to make progress on the massive Western Regional Interceptor project. The 10-mile interceptor is desperately needed to alleviate the current sanitary sewer system and accommodate future growth. It will provide much-needed relief to the entire system, channeling as much as 7 to 9 million gallons of wastewater daily from the Pleasant Run Interceptor, which is currently operating at or near capacity in some areas.

Since 2014, our administration has been rehabilitating aging and deteriorating sanitary sewer lines throughout the city by using the latest in industry technology, Cured-In-Place Pipe. The trenchless method doesn't require excavation in more than 99% of projects, which has allowed us to line 13 miles of pipe without tearing up any streets or driveways. We plan to continue this proactive rehabilitation.

The city's Stormwater department continues to operate a model program referenced by regulatory agencies for other cities to observe and mimic.

This past year, the department's education and outreach team hosted several events at the Greenwood Nature Center and Water Quality Testing Lab. Staff also continued efforts to drain and clean stormwater pipes throughout the city, preventing more than

450 tons of debris from entering our creeks, rivers, streams and neighborhood retention ponds.

Finally, I'd like to briefly touch on technology, which is not always thought of as infrastructure. Our administration has always prioritized investment in technology, which leads to a more efficient, accessible and cost-effective government.

We're replacing and expanding our public fiber network. We're upgrading our software and ensuring hardware is replaced after appropriate life cycles, and we continue to transition from a traditional phone system to a centralized and locally hosted Voice-Over IP system. These efforts are saving the city thousands on an annual basis.

When I speak with other Indiana mayors about our third pillar, Quality of Life, it's hard to contain my enthusiasm. The quality of life Greenwood offers its residents is a direct reflection of who we are and what kind of city we want to be.

Since day one, our administration has made it clear that quality of life is a top priority.

As I mentioned earlier, last fall we celebrated the completion of Old City Park's remarkable transformation. The park has been completely re-imagined and is once again a cornerstone of Old Town.

The park's recreational centerpiece is a 20-foot cube tower, the first of its kind in Indiana, and one of only three in the country. Other features include an 18-foot wide promenade adjacent to Pleasant Creek, seamlessly integrating into the creek's natural landscape. We have a custom climbing wall and, for younger children, a climbing net.

There is extensive open space, a new pedestrian bridge, urban porch swings, bocce ball courts and so much more.

Nearby, we're continuing construction on the Greenwood Fieldhouse, which is scheduled to open later this year. The Fieldhouse will be a year-round recreational and fitness center for our residents and serve as a destination for youth sports teams. It will be equipped to host a variety of sports, including volleyball, futsal, badminton, soccer, baseball, basketball, and of course, pickleball.

The facility will have an elevated, three-lane track for walking and running. It will also have Greenwood's first indoor turf field, complete with an electronic scoreboard and seating for spectators.

Personally, I'm most excited about the three golf simulators, but we can save my speech on those for another day.

Now, this is typically the point where I mention the overwhelming success of Freedom Springs and the Greenwood Community Center, but as we all know, those public assets were severely limited during the pandemic.

Instead, I want to use this time to extend my congratulations to the Greenwood Parks & Recreation Department for its accomplishments during the past 15 months.

Our staff worked tirelessly to shift, adapt and provide safe programs and events to residents. The department created Rec TV, a digital offering that served as an essential recreation outlet during the shutdown. Rec TV engagement continues to grow and will now play a role in programs moving forward.

In lieu of our popular Monster Mash event, the Parks Department planned and implemented a Halloween Parade to serve as a safe alternative.

We conducted an entire summer camp without ever having to shut it down. I can't tell you how many times staff were thanked by parents for providing much needed relief to working families.

The Parks Department kept Freedom Springs running and sold the most annual memberships in the facility's five-year history. After a brief closure, the Community Center opened as well, providing a safe space for people to continue exercising.

Amidst the pandemic, we held a successful Summer Concert Series, welcoming limited crowds to enjoy one of Greenwood's most popular summer traditions.

Taken as a whole, the department's pandemic response was truly exceptional, and I would put it up against any city in the country, large or small. Amazing job done by all.

Thankfully, I can report that city events and recreation facilities are officially back.

This weekend marks the return of Freedom Festival. We've already had three Summer Concerts, with no limitations on attendance. The Community Center is fully open, and Freedom Springs is already setting new records for attendance.

Greenwood is roaring back with a renewed energy and purpose.

Our goal for Quality of Life is to match that energy and create dynamic public amenities. We do this for both our current residents and to attract a skilled, talented workforce that places a high value on Quality of Life.

Which brings us to our fourth and final pillar, Economic Development.

I mentioned earlier that our administration has worked hard to position Greenwood for success, including the ability to navigate difficulty or uncertainty. We've highlighted several examples of this today, and our efforts to strengthen and grow Greenwood's economy is no different.

The pandemic halted economic development in many parts of the country, but not here.



In Greenwood, we've welcomed Milwaukee Tool and a new headquarters for ERMCO, one of the top electrical, systems and automation contractors in the country. Amazon continues to grow its presence at a rapid pace, with fellow Fortune 100 company FedEx setting up shop just down the road. We also saw major expansions for both Nachi and National Trade Supply.

Last year, we celebrated the opening of a new hangar at Indy South Greenwood Airport for the Indiana State Police Aviation & Special Operations Sections. The airport continues its impressive growth and has become a significant driver of economic development in both Greenwood and Johnson County.

In addition to the state police's new hangar, we recently completed a row of five new corporate hangars at the airport, three of which to be available to rent. One of the hangars will house the Experimental Aircraft Association's new Aeronautical Center of Technology, continuing the organization's longtime presence and partnership with Indy South Greenwood.

I'm also proud to report that Just PLANE Fun, our popular airport community event, returns this August.

In an effort to assist and promote development throughout the entire city, our new Zoning Code became effective last October. The new code offers a more efficient and user-friendly land use and development process, and I want to thank members of the community, as well as local realtors, neighborhood groups, developers and many others for their engagement throughout the process.

We've already seen significant interest in developing under the new standards, with three new neighborhoods submitted immediately following adoption. In 2020 alone, the city received more than 65 applications for new residential neighborhoods and commercial/industrial developments.

This year, we plan to focus on updating Greenwood's Comprehensive Plan. Similar to the Zoning Code process, our staff will gather diverse stakeholder input and engage interested members of the community during several steps along the way.

I'll close our discussion of economic development with what is likely the most exciting project of my tenure coming to fruition.

Four years ago during this same address, I announced the city's agreement to purchase the former Greenwood Middle School property, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to develop 19 acres in the heart of Old Town.

Earlier this year, we announced an \$83 million redevelopment of the property. The public-private partnership includes city investment in public infrastructure upgrades and a new parking garage that will provide desperately needed parking in Old Town.

The project will bring townhomes, condos and apartments to diversify housing options in our downtown. There will be commercial space for restaurants and retail, all of which will be anchored by the new Greenwood Fieldhouse. On top of all of that, we expect an additional \$1 million in annual tax revenue as a result of the redevelopment.

This is an important milestone in our years-long effort to revitalize Old Town and ensure its future as a thriving core. The project includes diverse, authentic amenities, seamless integration of greenspace and opportunities for all ages to live, work, play and stay in downtown Greenwood.

Now, if you've attended this event in the past, you know I usually like to include a surprise at the end of my speech. I'm happy to report we have reached that point.

Last year, we announced Greenwood would soon add to its list of destination parks with a new outdoor sports complex situated on 40 acres near the I-65/Worthsville Road interchange. Today, I'm pleased to offer you a first look at initial concepts and designs.

The new outdoor sports complex will have four softball diamonds, four baseball diamonds, and a multi-use playing field for soccer, cricket and more.

The complex will also feature the city's second splash pad and add to our inventory of inclusive playground equipment. We'll have trails, shelter houses and other features that cater toward local and traveling sports teams and their families.

It's another exciting public amenity we're confident will provide tremendous benefits to our community, both immediately and for future generations. Another example...of what we do in Greenwood. A prideful city, driven by thoughtful, meaningful progress.

PRIDE and PROGRESS.

It's year 10. Let's get to work.

Thank you.