

Welcome and thank you for attending. I'm honored to, again, tell you of the successes of our community as well as the challenges that lay ahead. As you know, my focus – for eight years now – has been on the future of Columbia City. It is on where we are headed, not where we have been. Of course, it's important to know your past so as not to replicate past mistakes. Yet, we cannot dwell on the issues or challenges of the past. In the words of Walt Disney, "Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future." And that we are.

As a reminder, a few of our big, overarching goals for Columbia City have been:

1. Reach a Population of 10,000 Residents by 2020
2. Continue to be one of the Safest Cities in Indiana
3. Improve and Invest in our Community
4. Retain and Attract Talent to Columbia City

So in these categories, how are we making progress? Let's recall the successes of 2018.

In **Population Growth**, we've seen continued success throughout our community in population and residential housing starts. In fact, last year Indiana University named Columbia City the eighth-fastest growing City in Indiana. Houses were going up throughout our community in Oakdale Ridge, Deer Chase, Lincoln Estates and Cambridge Crossing. Last year, our Building permits for Single-Family Dwellings totaled 68 new permits with an estimated construction value of over \$11 Million. This is over double the amount of last year's single family home permits. Overall Permits totaled 277 for an estimated value of almost \$16 Million dollars. Since 2010, we have experienced a growth rate of 3.4%, which is tremendous compared to numerous other communities that are our size facing stagnation or decline. I know the chart has a lot of data, but you can see how Columbia City has started to outpace our neighboring communities in the last few years. We've also outpaced the *National* growth rate! Of similar sized cities in our area, we are growing at a faster clip. Now, as you know, growth is important for multiple reasons. First, a growing city provides additional shopping, eating, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, which grows the economy. Second, it helps provides employees that are sorely needed in our

workforce. The biggest issues facing companies right now, as they report, has been finding the talent pool of employees to fill job vacancies. In fact, the booming economy is actually creating growth difficulties due to worker shortages, so expanding our community is necessary for the future of our business and industrial sectors. Finally, growth is good for diversity. It's important to provide a diverse community where people from different areas, thoughts, and backgrounds can come together to experience life. Many times, the richest parts of life are experienced in the company of others. We learn much about ourselves while spending time with others that aren't like us. And in a time where, especially in politics, the two parties couldn't be any farther apart from one another, it's critical that we put down our electronics and find ways to embrace the uniqueness of each of us. We are stronger, we are happier, we are better...together.

Now I would be remiss if I didn't mention that not only is our population growing, but our Per Capita Personal Income is growing as well. In fact, the Whitley County Economic Development Corporation reports that personal income is up over \$3,000 since 2016 and Household Income has eclipsed the \$60,000 mark for the first time in history. Not only are new residents moving into our community, but all of our residents are benefitting from the economic growth occurring in Whitley County. Because of this growth, our tax rate has remained low. In fact, we are one of the top 20 lowest City tax rates in the State of Indiana. We have worked hard to keep taxes under control, while continuing to invest in the things that matter.

For the **Safety** of our Residents, we continued to bolster our Police, Fire, and Dispatch Personnel. With the hiring of two new Police Officers, two new Dispatchers, and one new firefighter, Public Safety continues to be a priority for the City. We made some major investments into our public safety personnel to enhance their capabilities. In late 2018, the City Council approved the purchase of, effectively, a new dispatch center. This technological enhancement will equip our dispatchers with the newest, state of the art system that will decrease response times, improve interaction with the public, and create a safer environment for all involved. It will also give us the needed space to grow in the future. We project that this new Dispatch Center will be up and running this summer. We also doubled-down on our dispatch staff as we improved their skill sets and gave them greater access to trainings allowing them to take over Columbia City's Fire Dispatch earlier this

year. Some good news we received this past year is that our ISO rating decreased. This may not sound like anything important, but most insurance companies factor in the ISO ratings of a community as it figures home insurance rates. A decrease means a safer community, which means a potentially lower insurance rate. We also approved the purchase of a new Police Body Camera system that will upgrade their current 8-year old body cams. This is critical for evidence and transparency purposes. We partnered with the Whitley County Consolidated School Corporation to expand the School Resource Officer Program. With this expansion, we now have two uniformed police officers inside our school buildings every day of the school year. This partnership allows the City to retain those officers while school is closed, and spreads the financial burden between both entities. Make no mistake, this program is a huge success in ensuring the safety of our kids, but it also gives us information and potential leads to crimes that have/are going to be committed - which keeps our community safe.

2018 was a big year for **investment** into the City. The WoodDale Subdivision had an infrastructure overhaul that meant new roads, new drainage, new curbs, new street lighting, and new sidewalks. This area had been annexed into the City decades ago, but hadn't been treated as a part of it. The enhancements in this neighborhood have transformed the area, making it safer and more walkable. The Columbia City Housing Authority rolled out a new program in 2018 called the Residential Façade Loan Program. The Program provides Columbia City residents with the opportunity to beautify the exterior of their home. The City provides a 3-year, no interest loan with a cap of \$5000 per project. It is yet another example of how private residents can work with their local government to enhance our community. In 2018, we completed an Energy Savings Program in City Hall after pieces of the Ceiling began falling into our Police Department. This refurbishment was the first major improvement completed on City Hall since the early 1990s. The program included upgraded lighting fixtures and HVAC units, new exterior doors, replacement of the Roof, and securing ceiling components. We were also able to renovate the second floor, including a refreshment of the City Council Chambers. Another major investment was in our infrastructure as we began to construct a new sewer force-main from Steel Dynamics to the Water Pollution Control Facility. This project was necessitated as SDI continues to expand their production in Whitley County. The current sewer line was not large enough to handle the increase in discharge. With the help of the Whitley County Redevelopment

Commission, we are installing a new direct line to handle the increased discharge from SDI, as well as free up additional capacity in the current sewer line for future business growth in the County's TIF District.

Unemployment was at a decade-low last year reaching into the low 2% range. While this means that the majority of our residents are employed, it also means that **talent** becomes even more important as a focus for businesses and your local government. The City Council passed a new City policy that began Paid Maternity and Paternity Leave for City Employees who birth or adopt a child. Columbia City is one of multiple communities, and the State of Indiana, who have recently adopted this policy as a way to attract and retain talent in our employee pool. We also completed a Route Study for the new Trail Extension from Vine Street at Line Street to the *New* Columbia City High School/Indian Springs Middle School/Little Turtle Elementary School Campus. The study reviewed multiple ways to connect the campus to our trail system and our downtown for pedestrians or bike riders. We have applied for a trail grant and are awaiting word on funding for the construction of this project. The Redevelopment Commission also brought a major project to a successful conclusion. The RDC embarked multiple years ago on an insurance recovery lawsuit that, in 2018, brought resolution and financial resources towards the cleanup of the former Cardinal Grain/LML Corporation building on South Chauncey Street. A new project will now begin with demolition of the building and contamination cleanup as the primary goals.

Of course, no recap would be complete without the Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center, which opened on July 7th, 2018 to much fanfare. In just six weeks of operations, we saw over 14,000 people use the facility. That is an extraordinary number if you consider that the former Burnworth Memorial Pool averaged a yearly attendance of 2,000 people for a normal 13-week season. This facility, as you well know, is imperative to attracting and retaining talent for decades to come.

So that is just a taste of the many projects that occurred in 2018. Yet many additional improvements are on the horizon.

In 2019, we will continue to seek to grow our **population** by working with local builders and developers to grow our housing stock – whether single family housing or apartments, and encourage growth among our business community. Within the next two months, you

will see ground broken on a major construction project in downtown Columbia City. The Van Buren Flatts will be a new three story apartment building that will provide additional residential living options in the heart of our Community. The roughly \$5 Million dollar project is a partnership between the Columbia City Redevelopment Commission and the private developer and will be a welcomed addition to what is currently a vacant, gravel lot in the middle of our community. Many subdivisions are expanding, including Ravenwood and Cambridge Crossing, and discussions continue with other individuals who could increase our housing stock in Columbia City in the future. Of course, we are on the precipice of the 2020 Census. It will be vital for all of our residents to fill out the Census information completely. Many people don't realize the true impact the Census has on our community, whether it comes to grant dollars distributed, economic factors that private companies and businesses review, or how the City is treated as a part of the State of Indiana. My goal has been to get to a population of 10,000 people by 2020. I've said before that getting to this goal will give us many more economic opportunities into the future. We have one year left to continue building on the success I have already mentioned. And I have a strong feeling that we will be very close to that number. Finally, we will be working with a company named CGI to create some small videos to show off different aspects of our City on our City Website and other locations. The project won't cost taxpayer dollars and is scheduled to start this summer. I'm excited to build off the success of our previous video which we will continue to use into the future.

On the Safety front, we are in the middle of a process to hire five police officers as replacements for officers leaving or retiring. With a strong job market comes an increasing challenge for our City Government in retaining and attracting new talent. We are considering ways to increase retention among all departments within our City. Without sounding like a broken record year after year, our Fire Department will be adding another member to their ranks. We have continued to build this department in order to achieve a minimum staffing of three. In previous years, there have been times where we only had one full time firefighter on duty. We have worked our way up to a minimum staffing of two now and will reach a minimum staffing of three within the next couple of years. We have a great group of Volunteer firefighters that work side-by-side with our full timers, but as with all social organizations, we continue to be challenged to find additional volunteers - which is a nationwide issue. Adding staff not only improves our Firefighting ability, but also our

medical responsiveness. Of course, I spoke earlier about our new dispatch center that is being built. Our City's public safety will be dramatically enhanced by this improvement. Finally, as you may have heard, this past Tuesday our City Council approved a Safe Haven Baby Box to be installed into our fire station. This box is a last resort for mothers who feel they cannot care for their baby and want to relinquish it under the Indiana Safe Haven Law. While we hope and pray that children can and will stay with their birth parents, some situations don't pan out as we'd want. At the end of the day, the Baby Box is a safer, better, more loving option for these children than finding them deceased. Further, we are so thankful to the Whitley County Republican Women's Club and Northern Indiana Right to Life for already fundraising 2/3 of the costs of the baby box and installation. This is yet another example of how our residents see a need and step up to the plate for the benefit of all.

Community **Investment** will make for another very busy year in Columbia City. Although not funded in the Fall 2018 Community Crossings grant round, we are resubmitting for over \$1 MM in paving projects across the City in 2019. We anticipate hearing from the Indiana Department of Transportation within the next few weeks but even if we are only partially funded, many areas will be seeing new asphalt being laid this summer. We rolled out a new Neighborhood Beautification Grant Program earlier this year and have extended the application deadline to April 1st. This program is exciting because it truly is a public-private partnership. Three neighbors can join together to pool resources and complete a beautification project in their neighborhood, which can be matched, dollar-for-dollar up to \$1000, by the City. It's a great opportunity to assist residents as they spruce up their portion of our community. The Parks will be working on multiple investment projects this year, including the installation of new bathrooms at Devol Field. This is necessary as a multitude of sporting events and activities take place at these park facilities. Further, we will be adding to the excitement at the Russel and Evelyn Fahl Aquatics Center with the construction of a multi-use area on the Northwest side. The asphalt base will include three pickle ball courts and 2 half basketball courts. Once Fall arrives, a new synthetic ice skating rink will be installed and used for residents to enjoy throughout the winter months. We are excited to make the Fahl Aquatics Center a multi-seasonal facility. We will also be adding some new playground equipment at Southside Park along Swihart Street. Finally, the Parks will soon begin a planning process for the current CCHS property. With the Aquatics Center

completed, we are now turning our focus towards the future of the area directly adjacent to it. As you know, the new Columbia City High School is being built along State Road 9. Once vacated in fall of 2020, the current CCHS will be deconstructed and turned into greenspace. Once complete, the City Parks Department will take over this land. The future of what will go on this land, or how it will be used is still in the planning stages. Therefore, we will be embarking on a planning process within the next few months that will engage our citizenry to find out what THEY want in a new park space. The planning will also include a new vehicular bridge, with sidewalks, to connect Morsches Park with the new property. Stay tuned for more opportunities to give your input. And speaking of planning, we are going to re-start the downtown revitalization planning process this summer. We will be applying for a grant to assist us in preparing for a renovation of our downtown infrastructure – from sidewalks and curbs, to streets and public art. As with the park planning process, we will be frequently engaging the public to get their opinions. I'm excited to see what kind of improvements and enhancements can be made to the heart of our community.

On the Infrastructure front, much work is yet to be done. We received word late last year that the City was awarded \$700,000 towards the final phase of our Long Term Control Plan project. The picture here is just one piece of a much larger project which will complete our federally-mandated plan, installing underground retention basins to capture and hold combined sewer/stormwater until the rain event ends, then sending it to the Water Pollution Control Facility. As a reminder, this project was originally two projects with estimated costs of \$10-\$12 Million, which is now one project estimated to be \$9 Million and will be completed 4 years ahead of schedule. The construction will begin this fall and continue through fall of 2020. We were handed another mandate a few years ago regarding our Phosphorus limits. With the Blue/Green Algae blooms that have become an issue in multiple parts of the United States, the Federal Government has mandated us, through the State of Indiana, to lower the amount of Phosphorus that is discharged into the river from our Treatment facility. So, we are now mandated to make improvements to the Facility in order to decrease the amount of Phosphorus going into the Blue River. This project is anticipated to cost around \$800,000. The Electric Utility is working on multiple projects including a new solar park. Solar Panel technology has steadily become more economical and efficient. We are partnering with our power provider, the Indiana Municipal

Power Agency, to find a suitable location for a Solar Park in Columbia City. This is one way in which we can continue to diversify the IMPA portfolio and help limit peak demand cost. The Electric Department is also moving towards going completely with AMI meters. As I've mentioned in the past, we currently have a 100 meter pilot project that is showing us great results. These meters literally tell us if something is going wrong before it becomes apparent. They will help save the department by reducing the amount of trips to and from houses, help us to solve problems quicker and more efficiently, and provides additional safety features for our linemen. We appreciate a strong partnership with Northeastern REMC who has assisted us in components of this project. We will also be looking at Smart meters for the Water Department. For many of the same reasons, these meters are important to help reduce costs to the Department and improve efficiency. However, we are starting to look towards a water rate increase. For multiple years, the water utility has seen a decline in usage due to low-flow appliances. Despite multiple measures to manage this shortfall, there is a need to increase revenue to make the utility more solvent. The citizen-based Utility Rate Advisory Board has reviewed the matter and will be giving a recommendation in the near future. It is important to note, however, that Columbia City continues to have some of the lowest water rates in the State of Indiana. This doesn't mean it won't hurt. However, it is necessary for the sustainable future of the utility. On the Stormwater front, we continue to work to improve drainage throughout our neighborhoods and subdivisions for the health and safety of our residents.

Placemaking is an enormous part of **Retaining and Attracting Talent**. With the addition of an outdoor skating rink, additional park space, a future trail extension, and other projects, Columbia City continues to be a place where we attract talent. One project we are working on right now is an alleyway beautification project. The North/South half-alley, located between the former Northside Grill and Chapmans Brewery, will transform into a place for citizens and visitors to connect to one another. It will have unique spaces for residents of all ages and will be able to be utilized throughout the different seasons. While the final details are still being worked out on this project, I assure you that it will be a place that will attract a lot of positive attention. We are also working on a potential gateway beautification project in conjunction with B&J Rental on the Main Street corridor. We have applied for a grant to offset the cost to install public art on the B&J Rental building. This project will seek out artists, photographers, and creative individuals from our community to submit their art

for possible display on this thoroughfare on the South side of our downtown. For this, and many other grants, I am thankful for Lori Shipman and her continual assistance in finding dollars for us to make these ideas become reality. This fall we will roll out a new Hometown Heroes Banner Program to honor those residents who have served our country. More details on this program will be coming out later this year, but we are excited to give these heroes their due. Creating a place where people CHOOSE to live is the most critical element in retaining and attracting talent. These pieces, along with a new high school, expanded trails, improved facilities, and a welcoming environment will help us solidify our position as an attractive place to live for many decades to come.

As we moved into 2019, our City Staff and Elected Officials took the time to read a book by Peter Kageyama titled "For the Love of Cities". I would encourage you to pick up a copy – I have a few here for some of you to take free-of-charge, if you promise to read it. 😊 The book discusses how Cities can become more lovable, which certainly is a goal for every community. I mean, what City doesn't want to be loved by its residents? But the focus is that every action that we take as residents and government are pluses and minuses on the overall lovability of our City. When someone throws a cigarette butt out of their car window, it's a minus one. When someone stops to pick up that piece of trash that keeps rumbling down the sidewalk in the wind, that is a plus one. Our goal, as residents of this City, is to raise the pluses and lower the minuses. And we already have a head start! A Gallup Poll from 2009 showed that "smaller cities were more likely to generate passion and loyalty than larger cities". The future of our City relies on our citizens loving it. The future of our City relies on our City Government encouraging and inviting fun. And the future of our City relies on our co-creators, those people who go out of their way to make our community a better place for the rest of us; For those individuals to continue investing in Columbia City and encouraging and engaging more people to invest along-side them.

Before I conclude, I wanted to give an update on US 30's progress. As you know, US 30 has continued to see an increase in traffic volume. Trucks now make up 40% of the traffic volume on the road. To compare, in rural areas of I65 and I69, truck volumes make up only 30% of the traffic. We are now reaching 30,000 vehicles per day going through Columbia City. I don't have to tell you that State Road 9 and US 30 in the late afternoons are a mess.

This also bottles up streets like Walker Way, Frontage Road, and many others. We have consistently advocated for comprehensive solutions, not band-aid approaches. INDOT is currently working on a plan to upgrade US 30, and so we are anxiously anticipating the release of that plan. What we cannot do, however, is settle. We can't settle for a 20 year wait until something is done. Too many lives are at stake. We can't settle for J-turns at prominent intersections throughout our community. It's solving one problem, while creating another. We must put the wellbeing of our residents, and the economic future of our community ahead of any other factors. I strongly urge the Indiana Department of Transportation to complete and make public a plan of action that will address the tremendous challenges of US 30 within the next decade. Our residents and businesses are counting on your leadership and commitment.

Now, on a much lighter note, I must take a moment to recognize the people who work day-in and day-out to enhance and improve our community. Our Department Heads, Human Resources, and City Attorney, if they will stand ... do a fantastic job of managing, not just their own projects, but also the crazy stuff I throw at them on a daily basis. They have a passion to improve Columbia City, and I hope you will join me in recognizing their efforts. (CLAP) No man is an island and I certainly couldn't do this without their wise counsel. Further, my co-pilot Rosie Coyle and City Council Members, if they would stand ... work diligently to represent the people and businesses of our community. We work hard, together, to aim for creating the safest, most beautiful, most welcoming and hospitable community in Indiana. Will you join me in thanking them as well. (CLAP) As you can see it takes a team - A team of people who work together - professionally, respectfully, and with purpose - to make our little piece of the world a better place. *Personally, I think our federal government would do well to take notes from our Hoosier respect and professionalism.* If you include the Non-profits, Volunteers, Businesses, and others of our community, you can tell why Columbia City is not only growing, but thriving. And so, my friends, it is clear that **The State of our City is Thriving**. It is thriving because we have strong, measured growth. It is thriving because we have a safe and affordable community. It is thriving because we have stable utilities that can be depended on. It is thriving because we have people who truly care about one another. It is thriving because we are making investments into improving

the quality of life for all citizens. And it is thriving because residents can make a better life for themselves and their families right here, in Columbia City. And isn't that the goal for all of us? Isn't our goal to make our community a place where someone can grow, improve, and succeed as a person? It is, and will continue to be, our mission to provide a local government that improves the quality of life for our residents, while not infringing on their rights as citizens. We are at a unique moment in our history and we must continue to seize it. Issues will remain, but the strength of our community is found in our people. Let's continue to welcome people from across the globe into our little corner of the world, letting them experience first-hand the Hoosier Hospitality that is engrained into our community. Thank you and may God Bless you.