



**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**  
**Delivered by Mayor Sharetta Smith**

**Monday, March 14, 2022 at Lima Rotary Club**

Good afternoon,

To President Fitzgerald and members of the Lima Rotary Club, thank you for the invitation to speak today and thank you for your great work across the globe, and in communities like Lima.

Before I get into the State of the City, let me first take the time to acknowledge other elected officials, members of the clergy, members of my administration, the city workforce, and most importantly the citizens of Lima.

And a special acknowledgement of retiring Public Works Director Howard Elstro and Chief of Police Kevin Martin.

Together, both Howard and Kevin, have dedicated almost seven decades of public service to this community, building the infrastructure that has birthed much of the progress we see today:

- A downward trend in crime (36% from 2007 -2019), and 18% from January 2021 to March 2022.
- Implementation of body cameras
- Quality of Life Enforcement
- Two grade separations
- The Ottawa River Corridor; and
- Over \$500M in capital projects



This progress includes the opening of new businesses like Scorekeepers, Bareskin Beauty, and Our Town Roast.

Also,

Because of people like Michael Bouson who decided to make an investment in Lima, The Ohio Theater is on its way back.

The collaboration that has happened between Alter Ego Comics, Purple Feet Winery, Rustgaze Records, The Meeting Place, And Shop For Good has created Legacy Arts.

Thanks to Carlton Mclellan, a Lima Senior High School graduate with a passion for coffee that he wanted to share with his hometown, we have Vibe Coffee House adjacent to the 311 building on central.

Rhodes State University is on one end of downtown and the Mercy Health St. Rita's Graduate Medical Education Center is on the other.

And next month, thanks to the tenacity and ingenuity of the Lima Rotary Foundation we will break ground on the Greater Lima Region Amphitheater.

All across our city, in every ward people are making investments - putting in new siding and windows on homes and renovating buildings.

Unemployment remains steady at 4% with over 2200 available jobs within a 10 mile radius.

People are taking a risk on Lima.

Over the past two years our state has surpassed a record number of new businesses, many of those in Lima and Allen County.

Lima is being recognized for our hard work.

In the first quarter of 2022, we've been named one of 50 Smart Global Cities and named no. 3 in the nation in manufacturing among cities with a population of 150,000 or less.

City finances are healthy.

We started 2022 with a healthy reserve, and our largest revenue source - income tax collections is already up this quarter compared to this same time last year.

For two full years we have been battling a global pandemic that has claimed the lives and livelihoods of many of our family members, friends, co-workers and neighborhoods, and left us wondering “where do we go from here?”

With the retirement of baby boomers, we are in the midst of an intergenerational transfer of leadership.

For the first time in 32 years, Lima has a new mayor.

Ladies and gentlemen,

**THE STATE OF OUR CITY IS STRONG AND RECOVERING, BUT YET CHANGING.**

Since November 2, when the citizens of Lima elected me as their 59th Mayor, I have focused my attention on what matters most to them.

And I approach each day with humility, a listening ear and a heart to move our city forward.

If I can use a sports analogy, I’d say that right now, our city is in the very first quarter of the game, and we need to move the ball down the field in five areas:

1. Housing / Neighborhood Stability
2. The Economy
3. Public Safety
4. Students and Working Families, and
5. City Services

Moving the ball won’t be easy, mainly because none of us can do this work on our own.

Not my office ... not the private sector ... not any single neighborhood or church or agency;

But if we work together we can win.

On February 28th we passed a budget that reflects citizens priorities and helps us get the ball down the field.

Our 2022 budget includes:

- investments to expand the inventory of affordable, missing middle, and market rate housing
- investments that add additional personnel and increased wages for for police and fire; and
- investments to keep young people out of trouble by being intentional with support and opportunities

The 2022 budget also includes:

- investments in technology to help Streamline city processes,
- Investments to upgrade the streetscape in our downtown, and make timely and equitable repairs to aging roads, storm water, sewer and utility systems, other infrastructure throughout the city; and
- investments to help working families by growing household incomes through workforce development and supporting small businesses

We've added new faces to city leadership, appointing new members to some of our boards and commission - increasing the representation of women and minorities.

We heard from citizens that they feel like there is a disconnect between city hall and what is actually happening in the neighborhoods.

We launched a new initiative called "Walking the Wards" where we are out on the ground observing what's happening.

The first "Walking the Roads" it was snowing, the second we canceled because it was raining.

Last week the Mayor's office, the Public Works Department, and the Department of Community Development met at the Lima Fire Station on Main Street and walked the 6th Ward.

Starting this Thursday, we will be out every Monday and Thursday at noon until the first week in June, and I invite you all to join us.

Building back our city will require all hands on deck.

So I have been intentional about having conversations with private business owners - both large and small to hear their concerns and suggestions about how we improve this community.

I'm also grateful for the conversations I've been having with county commissioners. I've met with all three commissioners, and just last week, commissioner Beth Siebert and I had a very positive conversation about ways in which we can improve communication and collaboration between, not just the city and the county, but our neighboring governing partners as well.

I would like to pause and thank Commissioners Siebert, Winegardner, and Noonan because I understand that, this very partisan environment that we live in today does not lend itself easily to having those conversations.

I've also been spending time engaging with young people - 3rd and 4th graders at Unity Elementary, as well as freshmen and seniors from Temple Christian High School.

With elementary students I shared my favorite book - in what I hope is one step towards building a city of learners.

With high school students I'm recruiting and asking, "What does Lima have to offer to get them to stay?"

Lastly, we are out in the community hearing about citizen ideas for long-term transformational investments that are now possible due to federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan.

This work is hard — some of it, really hard — but we love this place too much to sit on the sidelines. And we are committed to a bold, transformative vision for the future and

are willing to take risks necessary so that every Lima resident in every neighborhood can — and must — benefit from what I believe will be a better Lima.

Two weeks ago, I made a presentation to Lima City Council and talked about the progress we've made, but I also talked about some statistics that I'd like to share with you today.

Let me first start out by talking about what's happening with working families.

Based on the research - wages for working families aren't keeping up with the cost of living. In the last two years, rent has increased by nearly 4%, while wages have only increased by 1.8%

As a result people are being pushed out of the middle class.

*Everything from gas to groceries costs more.*

*Even before the pandemic,*

- The median annual household income for working families in Lima was \$37, 531 - compared to \$58,642 for the state and \$53,131 for Allen County

When then look at education we see that here in Lima:

- Only 6% of Lima residents have a Bachelor's degree, compared to a state average of 28.3%;
- That number is alarming because according to the Department of Labor 75 % of all new jobs and 24 out of 30 of the fastest growing career fields have required postsecondary credentials since 2014.
- This is not an issue that just shows up in middle school or high school.Let me tell you why - 56% of kindergarten students are not on track to be proficient in reading and comprehension by the 3rd Grade;

When we looked at housing - the data tells us that current demands are not being met and there is a scarcity of quality affordable, missing middle & market rate units. There are:

- Nearly 500 vacant or abandoned lots
- 114 structures on our demolition list; and

- More than 6000 properties need significant repairs

The COVID-19 pandemic has also created particular hardships for small businesses; and

While overall crime has continued to decrease, violent crime has increased.

These facts are alarming, but not insurmountable because we've faced tough challenges before and together we overcame them.

We start by helping our small business owners and the people who work for them. If we want a strong economy - we have to help our small businesses thrive, and we have to position our labor force to earn a livable wage.

That's why we have created a new position - a workforce and small business development specialist to assist entrepreneurs and small business owners with navigating government processes; connect them with public and private agencies for resources and assistance securing loans, grants, tax abatements and other incentives and providing skills training and other resources to our labor force to prepare them for future of work.

But we won't stop there.

We will also:

- Create an "Early Matters" initiative, to expand access to early learning.
- Incorporate academic enrichment and opportunities in City recreation programs, including K-12 and college readiness supports,
- Work with school leaders and private organizations to provide support for out of school enrichment programs to increase graduation and college enrollment rates; and
- Convene leaders from industry, labor, and education to develop career-preparatory training that ties high school curriculum to real jobs targeting Lima's unique private-sector strengths.

We start by improving the health of our neighborhoods and providing housing by saving the structures we can and building where there is opportunity

We will do this work in a way that provides safe, quality, and affordable housing at every income throughout our city.

That's why we've created the Lima Community Improvement Corporation, a separate non-profit entity that will work with the city - acquiring and rehabbing properties that can be saved, attracting developers to rebuild on vacant lots, and preparing buyers to purchase homes in an effort to increase homeownership.

But we won't stop there.

That's why tonight, I'm asking the Lima City Council to place a moratorium on processing applications for properties through the city's land bank and taking a more aggressive and protective approach with enforcing our property code.

In this new era, we will stop speculative buyers and properties from being transferred to irresponsible owners as we intentionally rebuild our neighborhoods in a way that is not just affordable, but also safe and attractive.

We start by creating a city where we all feel safe (whether that fear is grounded in facts or perception), and we start by continuing to make investments in our safety services.

For too long we've burdened police officers with responsibilities that they never asked for, and part of that is because of our society's collective failure to address low educational attainment, a shortage of living wage jobs, and the state of our neighborhoods

Part of that is making sure we have enough officers on the streets, but it is also about pushing the envelope, and investing in the alternatives to policing that prevent crime and interrupt cycles of violence.

The other part is seeking out partnerships like the one we have with the Mental Health Recovery Services Board where behavioral health professionals accompany both police and fire on calls for service with the goal of providing real results for those that are suffering from mental health challenges that too often go untreated and crowd our court systems and our jails.

If you think for one moment that I am talking about defunding the police, you are listening to the wrong mayor.

Let me say this. As long as I'm Mayor, safety services will continue to be the city's number one budget priority.

But I am talking about forging a path of cultivating community health, mutual understanding, and a culture where law enforcement and the community take joint responsibility for keeping us safe.

I'm talking about investing in people and police.

I'm talking about creating a violent reduction initiative using community intervention workers who have lived experience of lives interrupted by crime, but who have turned those experiences into opportunities to help others avoid the wrong path.

I'm talking about getting to our young people before the streets get to them, and stopping violence before it starts.

In closing, as I think about the people I've visited over the past year, in neighborhoods across our city where we have been walking -- and as I consider the progress we've made, the battles we've fought and overcome and the work that lies ahead -- I will say again that **THE STATE OF OUR CITY IS STRONG, RECOVERING AND CHANGING.**

A city that was founded in the middle of swamp during the height of malaria when many said this place was uninhabitable.

A city where the discovery of oil brought the industrial empire known as Standard Oil.

A city where we were once the largest producers of first locomotives and later school buses in the world.

A city who since 1970, has seen a population decline of nearly 20,000.

But also a city who has been fighting her way back and is now in a position to win.

We have some tough challenges ahead, and a lot of ground to cover in a short amount of time,

But, the folks in Lima,

We know how to play ball.

If we remember that we are better when we play together and stay on the same team,

We will build a “Better Lima”.

Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless our great city.

###