



STATE OF THE CITY
Mayor Vince Williams
February 17th
Benjamin Banneker High School

I. OPENING

Thank you....Thank you.....

An enormous thank you goes out to each of you for your attendance tonight braving the weather, and for giving me the incredible opportunity to report on the progress of our city, and for the honor you have given me in serving as your Mayor. Your very presence is an affirmation that we are **UC Strong**. And as I look into the audience, I am again reminded that Union City belongs to all of us and that our progress is **NOT** attributable to one person alone but is a powerful manifestation of **COMBINED** efforts through the work of **TEAM UC**.

Principal DeMarcos Holland and the staff of Banneker, I thank you for graciously hosting this event and for showing us community connection at its absolute best.

To our citizens and businesses, **TEAM UC** exists because of you. You are **truly** (PAUSE) our most treasured asset, and we do not take the faith and trust you have placed in us lightly.

The spotlight is oftentimes on one person and that's the Mayor of a city. That's just the truth of how it is. But I want you to know that tonight, Union City comes as many, particularly the four members of my City Council. I am going to ask each of my colleagues on the City Council to stand as I call their names, and be acknowledged for the outstanding work they do on behalf of this community. Mayor Pro Tem Angelette Mealing, Councilwoman Joyce Robinson, Councilwoman Shayla Nealy, and father to one of Union City's newest and most beautiful residents - Councilman Brian Jones!!! Make no mistake about it....Union City is moving forward as a result of their commitment and **partnership**. As I reflect on our journey together, I am so incredibly grateful for their belief in this community and for their conviction to help make it even greater.

I would like to thank all of our elected officials who are present. And if there are any elected or appointed officials with us this evening please stand! Thank you for not only being the committed public servants that you are but for being our most valuable allies in our quest to edify Union City.

To our City Manager Sonja Fillingame, City Clerk Jaki Cossey, all of our Union City TEAM Members, **thank you** for all that you do, each and every day.

Public service is the **real** driving force behind the success of **Team UC** and you make this Council proud to ride along with you.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the legacy of Ms. Terry Wert tonight. Terry was one of our own, and a true Team UC champion. Unfortunately, we lost Terry just a few short weeks ago, but there's no doubt that her love of service will certainly live on.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my wife Sharon and our daughter Nia, who both understand the importance of giving back to a City that has blessed us beyond measure.

I. TEAM UC

Team UC (PAUSE).I am so proud of us. **Every day** I am inspired (PAUSE).

Together, we are raising the bar, relentlessly marching forward, undaunted, and on fire.

We are determined to be the City known for reinventing itself in the **BIGGEST** way possible. **In the biggest way possible** [[REPEATED]].

We have a balanced budget of \$32 million dollars, we're not in the red, but we must strengthen our reserves for rainy days! **And We Will!**

We should be proud of what we are accomplishing. We have pulled together and are working collaboratively to overcome adversity. In reality, sometimes **adversity** is what you have to face in order to be **great**. A wise person once said that the stars shine bright because they push through the darkness. Ladies and gentlemen, I am here to tell you that Union City's star is shining bright.

II. FACING ADVERSITY

So let's pause for a moment and think about the road we have traveled over the last few years.....

Like many across the country, Union City **was** certainly impacted by the Great Recession. Our largest revenue source is property taxes. The recession's resulting impact of declining property values and foreclosures hit **HARD (PAUSE)** and led to serious budget shortfalls.

Unemployment rates were increasing at an all-time high!

We were experiencing serious declines in the issuance of building permits and planning fees. The recession was causing development to plummet.

Union City was losing core businesses and losing them fast. Union Station Mall is an excellent example of the economic reality we were facing. The Recession decimated the already financially challenged mall and led to the final closing of its doors.

We were in the midst of the perfect storm and the City Council and staff had to rise to the challenge and rebuild one step at a time. In fact, we had to roll up our sleeves and just like the families and businesses in this community who were also challenged by the Recession; we had to make tough choices. **Tough choices** [[Repeated]]. This required prioritization of needs, making serious financial cuts, and keeping an even tighter and closer eye on our budget to ensure that it is aligned with our revenues.

We had to reassess and rethink our model for attracting new development by promoting and marketing our City aggressively. We wanted developers to see what **Team UC** sees---and that, ladies and gentlemen, is the fact that **the SKY is the ONLY limit for Union City. Listen closely.... The SKY IS THE ONLY LIMIT for Union City.**

Yes (PAUSE). ..The Recession placed us in the midst of the perfect storm...But you know what? **Everything** we wanted for this community was standing right on the other side....And, just like the stars in the sky, we had to allow our community's light to pierce through the darkness.

So we faced our challenges....Hit them head on....And now we are seeing the fruits of our labor. We are rebuilding....And, let me assure you, we are coming back stronger than ever.

It brings me great joy and enormous pride to report that Union City is making a **comeback**. **Listen closely** (PAUSE)....Union City **IS** making a comeback.

III. OUR FOCUS

Our focus is simple....**Rebuild..Rebrand..Revitalize**SAY IT WITH ME....

Rebuild..Rebrand..Revitalize.... We must recognize that together, we have the power to change this community.

Do you believe? Because I believe. I believe that if we have the power to overcome economic and budget pressures; the power to promote job opportunities; the power to increase our community amenities; and **even** the power to take a vacant and

abandoned mall and turn it into something wonderful----**Then surely**, we must believe that, **together**, we have the power to make Union City an exceptional place where we can all thrive; where our children can maximize their potential; where our seniors can realize their goals and dreams; and where both our small and big businesses are successful.....

Yes.....Team UC's unwavering focus has to be **Rebuild...Rebrand...Revitalize...We** must continue being about the business of growing this community. We want a first choice destination for families—**No....We WILL BE a first choice destination for families**. We will provide a top shelf education in school systems that are given the resources they need to help elevate our kids. Principal Holland, I am **consistently** amazed by what you and your staff do here at Banneker, but I also recognize that as a community we must **strengthen our partnership with** our schools.

And so, I want us to think about partnership tonight. The strategies that I am proposing must be executed in the spirit of partnership. Let's think of it this way. A **SHIP** is designed to take you places. Right? Well, I submit to you that if we are going to take U.C. to the next level then we have to act in the spirit of partnership, so we can continue to go places and grow as a community.

Next, let's talk about our commitment to improving City Services and Operations.

IV. IMPROVE CITY SERVICES AND OPERATIONS

Listen closely.....Our community is changing and, so too, must our city's business practices. Team UC, the status quo will not take us to the future city we have

envisioned. It will not help us transform this community. **Our citizens are expecting and demanding more.** They want to see change. So we must be vigilant in our quest to improve city services and operations..... Immediate and significant measures are needed to continue to move forward and meet the needs of our residents and businesses. I do know that doing nothing is not an option!!!

Where do we start? We start by establishing an even more financially resilient city. This means implementing policies to help protect and generate new revenues. It means taking approaches like we just recently did with the refinancing of our 2006 General Obligation Bonds. This resulted in cost savings of close to a quarter of a million dollars. It means negotiating with our vendors to reduce operational costs and aggressively pursuing federal and state grant opportunities.

It means keeping our financial house in order. Thanks to the leadership of City Finance Director Tarsha Calloway I am proud of the fact that the Government Finance Officers Association has once again awarded us with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting.

Making improvements also means stepping up to the plate and taking the difficult and challenging stance of overhauling our water services. This has been a particularly tough year for our water utility. We are facing an aging infrastructure and the City Council and I are making the replacement of aged water meters a priority. Updating our current system will provide us with an opportunity to not only gain efficiencies with our reading and billing but also improve customer service.

If we are to excel in our service delivery, we must focus on continuous improvement. We have to offer our citizens increased value with decreased waste. Customer service, not only has to be, but must **always** be at the forefront of everything we do.

It is imperative that we leverage new and emerging technologies **and resources** so that we can provide excellent options for our customers. A great example of this is our Utility Line Warranty Program. We partnered with the National League of Cities on this program which provides low-cost, worry-free warranty protection for water and sewer lines. With that being said I have a testimony related to this service from one of our senior residents, Mrs. Mulola Wilcox-Stanford, had an incident with a water line break that cost over \$4,000. Unfortunately, the break was on the property owners side which meant she was responsible for the charges for the water loss and any needed repairs. Well, we were certainly able and happy to make the necessary arrangements for payment for water loss, but there were the repairs that had to be addressed out of pocket. I shared with her the viability of the new partnership we had with Utility Line Warranty Program. She immediately took advantage of the opportunity to sign-up and within less than 4 months she had another break on her side of the line that cost upwards of several more thousand dollars, but she didn't have to spend a dime out of pocket, she was fully covered by the Utility Line Warranty Program..... Mrs. Wilcox-Stanford if you're here this evening please stand.....

PARTNER SUMMARY

PARTNER NAME	PRODUCT DESCRIPTION	BEGIN DATE	END DATE	ENROLLMENTS	CLAIMS FILED
Union City, GA	External Sewer Line Warranty	Jan 01, 2011	Feb 13, 2015	187	11
	External Water Line Warranty	Jan 01, 2011	Feb 13, 2015	159	29
Total For 1/1/2011 To 2/13/2015				346	40
TOTAL (To Current Day)				346	40

In addition to improving our city services and operations, we must also:

V. STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY OUR ECONOMY

In order to continue to strengthen and diversify our economy, we must work untiringly to support and advance our existing businesses. We must also make a concerted effort to attract new businesses, and keep UC attractive and strong enough for our citizens to want to continue to live and shop here. There must be amenities that every community should have access at their disposal, such as robust public transportation, libraries, playgrounds, medical facilities, and yes in the State of Georgia even a **Chick Fil A restaurant!**

I have said it before, and I will say it again. **UC IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS.** We have had **major** wins in 2014 with our push forward.....This past year **Procter and Gamble....Menlo Logistics..... Walmart.... Steak and Shake....**And yes...**Rooker Development and 404 Film Studios....** all chose to call Union City home.... But I submit to you that we cannot afford to get complacent and as we continue to move into this new year, we have to push forward and place ourselves in a strategic position to compete and win future business.

Continued progress must be made in order to keep our business climate alive and welcoming. This means promoting an environment for residents and businesses to prosper....This equates to backing fundamental policies like **zero-tolerance for litter in our community** and strategic and targeted initiatives to include identifying and recruiting complementary businesses that expand the goods and services available to residents....

John Rooker, Ed Richardson and Brian Livesay, I want to thank you for bringing Hollywood and the film industry to our community. And even more importantly, for allowing it to serve as the catalyst that will bring the additional retail, restaurants, and commercial options Union City needs and deserves. I also want to thank Majestic Realty, for their longstanding presence here and helping to put Union City on the map as a place major businesses can call home. Ladies and gentlemen, this is partnership. Even better, this is what happens when you **believe and put in the work**.

Now, allow me to go back to **the issue of litter** for just a moment. (PAUSE) I cannot begin to tell you how deflating it is (PAUSE) to see piles of refuse stemming from those who have elected to simply toss their trash on our streets as opposed to disposing of it properly.... The City Council and I will rage a war on litter this year and raise the bar on community appearance. Standing with us will be our Public Service Team, Police Department, Code Enforcement Division, and our Municipal Court Judges. But it will also be our citizens, because again, **it takes partnership**.

And speaking of not doing it alone, I would like to thank Mayor Mario Avery and the City Council of Fairburn for their partnership in establishing a gateway along the Hwy 29 and 138 Corridor—jointly strengthening both of our communities' sense of place and improving our appearance along two vital thoroughfares.

Economic Development. *Welcome "Nicole Dozier"* Key to economic development is having incentives to attract and retain business. We must do an even better job this year with our incentive programs. Incentives are not giveaway programs, but rather investments to bring about positive economic returns by creating jobs and tax revenue.

We were the first city in the metro-area to receive the Opportunity Zone designation, allowing for a five-year, \$3,500 dollar tax credit for each fulltime position created. This designation will continue to ensure job growth in Union City. We also have Foreign Trade Zone status as an incentive which helps businesses remain competitive by reducing processing fees and enhancing the movement of goods in a global market place.

Also on our agenda is creating:

VI. STRONG, SAFE, & SECURE NEIGHBORHOODS

We have to create and maintain safe and appealing neighborhoods where people choose to shop, work, play, and stay. Pivotal to this, is addressing our city's infrastructure challenges. Preservation and restoration of our City infrastructure is critical mass for us right now. We have to make sure that we have a strong and secure "built environment." Under the guidance of Public Services Director Cedric Clark, we are making progress...Our recent capital projects include: MARTA improvements at the intersection of Roosevelt Highway and High Point Road, 2013 CDBG project to replace the bridge culvert on Shannon Boulevard as well as the resurfacing of Dodson Road at Gullatt Elementary School.

Projects currently underway: Buffington Road Bridge replacement project, Shannon Parkway, and Oakley Industrial Boulevard widening project;

Our Public Services team is committed to developing and maintaining a topnotch storm water maintenance program. The City is addressing several issues from rehabilitation

and infrastructure improvements, soil and erosion control projects, as well as education and public outreach. We have dedicated a considerable investment this year in stormwater improvements. It is imperative for businesses who maximize our economic development incentives to pay their share of stormwater. Because that's partnership and it is the right thing to do.

We completed an Inflow and Infiltration (I&I) project to determine if any rehabilitation is needed to the City's sewer system. We have already received an excellent return on investment as a result of this initiative and are expecting to save approximately \$720,000 a year. This is due in large part to our coordination efforts with Fulton County and revisions based upon basin flow analyses.

I would like to now highlight one of our most important strategic goals as a community, and that is to deliver excellence in Public Safety. We, like all communities, have come ever closer to the need to strengthen our prevention efforts and prepare our community for potential crisis and other emergencies. Before I go any further, I would like to thank our Public Works, Fire, and Police Departments for their work this time last year with the snowstorms. I cannot begin to tell you how grateful our community was for your preparedness, response, and ability to keep our residents safe.

2014 was a tough year for our Police Department. A recent study initiated by the federal government may have stated it best. "Maintaining the police workforce level is consistently one of the **GREATEST** challenges facing law enforcement agencies." And **so it has certainly been for UC.** Police departments must fill their ranks from applicants who meet fundamental qualifications. The military, federal, and state police

agencies recruit similar individuals, and quite honestly, opportunities with these agencies have increasingly grown. **I am pleased to report that we have replaced most of our staff losses in the Police Department and currently are at almost 95% capacity.**

Let's talk about crime rates for a moment. We all know that the crime rate is increasing---not just in Union City but in the metro region and across this Nation. Statistics rate Georgia as 5th in the Nation for vehicle thefts, unfortunately, we know this all too well. Right before this past Christmas one of our own members of the City Council was carjacked at gunpoint, and we continue to thank GOD for her not being physically harmed! Some of recent stories we've all heard in the metro area hit hard, such as an entire family becoming the victim of murder suicide; the elderly couple known for helping others who lost their lives after meeting someone in good faith to buy a car; the young college student who was recently gunned down after meeting someone from Craig's list for the purchase of a cell phone.....Ladies and gentlemen.... I know I am not alone when I acknowledge that this **YEAR** (PAUSE) has gotten off (PAUSE) to a **shocking** start in metro Atlanta.

WE CAN NOT HAVE IT. IT IS SIMPLY UNACCEPTABLE.

As Mayor, I am committed to making our community safe, and I won't let up until we have accomplished that goal. We have to recommit ourselves along with our citizens to the policies and responsible behavior that create safe streets....**PERIOD...**

I am making 2015 a year of even stronger community policing and outreach with city residents and businesses by holding safety forums, meeting citizens where they are---in their neighborhoods, at their homeowners association meetings, and at community events. I want more patrol and foot patrol to enhance officer presence in our community and to work even more closely with local, state, and federal agencies to target violent individuals and strengthen intelligence sharing. Our Police Department will continue its modernization efforts through new technology programs that have proven successful in reducing crime.

Listen closely....We must combat crime through **partnership**. We have to all work together. We've forged a stronger relationship with our Sheriff Ted Jackson, also with Fulton County Police Chief Cassandra Jones, Fulton County Fire Chief Larry Few, and I am proud, for example, of our relationship with Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard and his interest in placing a community prosecution office in Union City.

Community Prosecution (PAUSE)....It attacks drug trafficking, sex trafficking, and gun violence. We are facing a major challenge with displacement of crime from other areas. But the message the City Council and I along with Police Department are sending in 2015 is **LOUD AND CLEAR: WE CAN NOT HAVE IT....WE WILL NOT HAVE IT....AND WE WILL BE VIGILANT IN SHUTTING YOU DOWN IN UNION CITY.**

Union City Police Chief Chuck Odom leads an exceptional Department that expects professionalism, respect, and sensitivity from its officers --- and they, in tandem, work tirelessly to protect our citizens.

As citizens, we need to help our police officers do their jobs by having open communication, reporting criminal activity, and by cooperating with authorities when

crimes are committed. The greater good is creating a better, safer, and stronger Union City for our children. We must work together, and not against one another!

Allow me to transition to Union City's Fire Department. The City Council and I recently appointed our new Fire Chief Joe Maddox. Chief "Babyface" Maddox has been a part of the UCFD for over 30 years, and he is leading an outstanding team who are dedicated to protecting the lives of our citizens.

In 2014, the Fire Department responded to **3309** EMS calls and **739** fire-related calls for a total of **4048** calls for service. The Fire Marshal's office performed **2112** inspections.

But to bring the true impact of our men and women in fire services home, I read to you an excerpt from a letter we received from one of our residents:

It reads..... *To My Heros:*

You responded to a call and that call was for me. I just want to thank my life savers who also called to check on me while in the hospital.

Ladies and gentlemen....This is the level of service our citizens want.....Not only did firefighters **Micah Wallace, Jacob Clay, Trey Spivey, and Ardie Walton** save the life of Mr. David Edwards, but they went further and checked on him while he was hospitalized....Don't get me wrong. Providing the emergency and life saving response makes me incredibly proud, **but so too does the phone call**....Because that's the type of excellence we are certainly aiming for. 2014 was an extremely productive year for **Parks and Recreation**. Our sports programs are making their mark in district competitions, league championships, and cheer competitions. Thanks to Parks and

Recreation Director Lee Blich, the program's participant population has sky rocketed and we continue to offer great options including summer outdoor movies, painting classes, karate, Toast Masters and more. We take pride in our beautiful trail system at Ronald Bridges Park and continue to promote health and wellness. But we must put a stronger focus on true health and wellness. Thanks to my friend, **Nazeera Dawood**, Health Promotion Program Manager of the Fulton County Dept of Health & Wellness for these statistics affirming that approximately 27.8% of Union City's adult population is obese. Elementary schools in the Union City area have an obesity overweight prevalence of more than 40%. The asthma ER visits in this area is in the range of 37 - 60 people per 1000 people. Also know is that the USDA has defined Union City as a food desert since the last census tract, food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. What this actually means is we need more grocery store opportunities in Union City! Heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and health care in general has been challenging in UC. This year, I will be working with my City Council and City Manager to establish a healthy community campaign, that will support wellness for our residents. In a few months we will have one of our very first of many Community Health Day events in partnership with Dr. Michael Obiewe and the RHFAN Church. We can't talk about the gains in Parks and Recreation without recalling the tragedy that struck our Union City family with the life altering accident of volunteer coach Jonathan Magwood; we keep him in our prayers and remember his passion for kids as we develop high quality programs for our youth.

Speaking of our youth, I would like to acknowledge Monique Richardson and Christian Wiggins tonight. You are both clear testaments of the promise of tomorrow. Monique is a beneficiary of our Union City Internship program. She worked hard in the early years of our program, recently graduated with her **Bachelors Degree** and has a passion for **marketing and communications**. I would like to think that her time with in Union City played a small part in her career path and her love of public service.

Christian is a remarkable young man—who has shown great leadership skills and dedication for others. **Read Chris' letter...** *Dear Mayor Williams,*

My name is Christian Wiggins and I am 9 years old. I have ran lots of races in my time and I have an idea that will make all of Union City fit and healthy. I have thought of a Union City 5k FALL CLASSIC! Now the race will start in the old Shannon Mall and end in Ronald Bridges Park. I have also created a logo for the race. Entry fee will be \$20 for adults (14-59), \$9 for kids (4-13), and \$10 for seniors (60+). This idea came from watching lots of people everyday walking and running on the track and instead of running in circles I thought they could run around the city. Mayor Williams I will be anxiously awaiting your response.

Sincerely,

Christian Wiggins

Tonight I've spoke as Mayor of Union City—but I would like to name an honorary Mayor for 2015, **Christian Wiggins**. In so many ways Chris and Monique symbolize the spirit of our community and represent the very best of what Union City stands for. Their determination and optimism serve as models for us all. First before I close, I want to answer one of the questions I'm most often asked. "Vince, what's the biggest challenge facing Union City?" My response is always... the biggest challenge we're facing is always changing. But, the key to overcoming all of these challenges is constant. That is **partnership**. We have strong partnerships with many leaders and organizations in the municipal government arena such **Georgia Municipal Association, Atlanta Regional**

Commission, National League of Cities, First Lady Michelle Obama's - Let's Move Cities Towns and Counties, and the United States Conference of Mayors, just to name a few. **Collaboration** is the driving force behind every success we've had in the last few years, and especially this past year. It sounds simple, but it doesn't happen everywhere. Washington has become paralyzed by divisiveness. While similar conflicts exist here, we flat-out refuse to get bogged down by politics or petty jurisdictional differences that would divide us.

We have chosen, instead, to spend our energy **building consensus** and **working together**. Our residents expect and deserve no less.

As we searched for a way to express this ideal, I was reminded of a three-word lesson taught to our children in one of the classrooms right here in our community.

Together... We Will... What exactly does it mean?

Well, it reminds us all that whatever our goal is... accomplishing that goal must begin with partnership.

How are we going help our neighbors make it through difficult times?

Together... We Will...

How will we create new careers and new industries for our residents?

Together... We Will... How will we keep our neighborhoods safe?

Together... We Will.... And, how will we ensure that Union City is the best place anywhere to live, work, learn, raise a family, and thrive?

Together... We Will...

Ladies and gentlemen, I will close by once again asking a pivotal question.....**Do you believe? Because I believe.....I believe we are READY in Union City. It's our time.**

We WILL Rebuild. Rebrand. And Revitalize. And we WILL change this community for the better. I am incredibly grateful for having an unprecedented

opportunity to serve the City I absolutely love and to be a part of Team UC. Thank you.

May GOD bless you and may HE continue to bless Union City.....

The Future Is Now!!!