

2022 State of the City - FOCUS

Mayor Vince Williams

City of Union City, Georgia

What's Up Union City?!!! Thanks everyone for joining us tonight.

Look, I want to begin my time with you, by thanking a few key people.

WOW, the Banneker High School Marching Band thank you.

Banneker's leader and Principal Dr. Jason Stamper, thank you sir for the hospitality. The mesmerizing vocals of Ms. Latrice Strickland, right here in Union City, thank you. One of the coolest and smoothest cats on the Saxophone, do they still say cats? Mr. Jeff Sparks thank you!!! Look, don't you just love my friend and good brother Dr. Rashad Richey?

My baby the entertainment news Queen, my daughter Ms. Nia Williams, thanks Princess! A Huge thanks to all of our sponsors for tonight's event. Thank You!!!

For the past nine years, I have had the distinct honor and humble pleasure to serve as the 20th Mayor of this GREAT CITY. Throughout that time, we have experienced tragedy and loss, financial turmoil and financial perseverance, a global health pandemic that has devastated many families and a revolutionary cultural movement that has swept across our nation. As we continue to pray for the people of *Ukraine* and

examine America's presence on the global stage, it is critical that we maintain a robust and vibrant democracy here at home and continue to work to fulfill the promise of America's cities, towns and villages, and even across the globe.

We have challenges, to be sure. **Our WORLD is in trouble!!!** We can't leave our neighbors in harms way.

In the face of adversity, we have persisted with great fortitude. And in the presence of our creator – JESUS CHRIST – HE HAS RISEN! I am glad to once again report that the State of.. **OUR** City is Strong, and growing Stronger!

It is with a distinct pleasure that I stand before you tonight with a unique **Focus** on moving our city forward. In 2021, I spoke from a very similar room in our community center where many of you joined me from your computer screen, tablet or phone and listened as I delivered the annual update of our city, virtually. But this year is a little different...It feels a little more... *normal—although it is a new normal*. I am immensely proud to be joined tonight by our **DYNAMIC** Union City Family.

As Mayor, I have the responsibility of navigating our UC ark, just don't call me Noah! Look, I depend heavily on the advice of the members of our City Council. There's nothing that could be done in our city without

the collaborative support and guidance of these amazing leaders. Family, please stand as you are recognized... Mayor Pro Tem Angelette Mealing, Councilman Brian Jones, and Councilwoman Christina Hobbs. I also have the honor of introducing our newest member of Council, Councilwoman Lawanna Owens-Twaites. This group of outstanding individuals truly LEAD Together, with respect and love. I want to thank each of you... for the tireless work that you do on behalf of all our citizens and for harvesting the firm foundation for which we stand today.

Please be seated!

The work that government officials do is often tireless and thankless work. And in Union City, we are fortunate to have time-tested Leaders who inspire us to continue our **Focus** for a more prosperous and thriving Union City. To the best, and I mean this with every fiber of my being, the absolute BEST City Manager ever Sonja Fillingame, Assistant City Manager Tarsha Calloway, Chief Municipal Court Judge Ronald Freeman, City Clerk Shandrella Jewett, City Attorney Dennis Davenport, and members of the Union City Senior Leadership Team, will you please stand? Please give this dynamic group of leaders a hand.

Please be seated!

I thank you for all that you do to move our city forward.

My colleagues on City Council, our Administrative Team, nor our Senior Leadership can move our city *anywhere* without the hard work, dedication, and **Focus** that the **200+** members of our Union City Staff bring each and every day. The work that we do to make our community a place to live, work, and thrive starts right here within our own City. Our Human Resources Team, led by Linda Goodman-Warren continues to work diligently to recruit and hire the best talent in not only the region or the state, but across the country.

I applaud each and every Union City employee for your tireless efforts to make our city, the shining beacon that we continue to strive to become.

And I wouldn't be standing here today... as the man that you see before you... Without the light of my life. My eternal flame. The woman who challenges me to not only be a better husband and father, but a better individual... Folks, the rhythm of my heartbeat! My beautiful wife, the First Lady of Union City, Sharon Williams!

Please also extend a warm welcome to our daughter, Nia who has done an awesome job tonight, but I want to thank her, for her continued support to me throughout my endeavor to make Union City a welcoming

place for all, she was raised right here in Union City, and UC will forever be in her heart!

Members of Union Cities Authorities, Boards and Commissions, please stand and be recognized at this time. These leaders play an integral role in what we do and how we do it.

There are a number of federal, state, county, local elected and appointed officials who have chosen to join us this evening, please stand and be recognized at this time.

Teachers of the Year – Jumoke Oyesanya & Ms. Marshe Collins; both Liberty Point

Professionals of the Year - Ms. Alentryal Jackson; C. H. Gullatt & Mr. Quinton Hunt; Liberty Point

Faith Based Leaders

The work that we do in our region, in our county, in our state, and throughout our country would not be possible without the work that each of you do. I am forever thankful for your friendship and continued support.

Our city would not be able to flourish without the culture of collaboration we continually market in Union City. I thank you for your service.

Throughout our one hundred- and fourteen-year history, Union City has strived to exceed the needs of our residents, neighbors, friends, and families. As Mayor, I have worked hand-in-hand with members of our City Council to increase quality of life. In 1908, our city was founded to serve as the national headquarters of the National Farmers Union, and since that time, we have grown to be the landing pad of numerous companies who have chosen to call Union City their home. A few of those who have planted roots are Coca-Cola United, Amazon, ASOS, Atlanta Metro Studios, and Proctor & Gamble.

We are **focused** on creating a city where all citizens feel that their needs are front and center. That is why I am beyond proud to introduce to you our “**R cubed**” initiative. R cubed is an abbreviation for three very powerful words... **Reclaim, Renew, and Reimagine**. The COVID-19 pandemic gave city leaders an opportunity to rethink how we can best serve our constituents. Our plan to **reclaim, renew, and reimagine** Union City is the catalyst that will allow us to promote infrastructure improvements, promote public safety initiatives, and increase our commitment to high quality job creation.

The R cubed initiative envisions our city in three different zones. Our first zone aims to **reclaim** and revitalize our parks area to become a natural landscape for outdoor recreational activities, community health initiatives, and fitness activities. Our City Council has committed to continue our investments in this area by vigorously supporting our Parks and Recreation Team members who have already implemented several initiatives aimed at increasing the quality of life for all residents of Union City. Even as we begun entering the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Recreation Department with the most community centric leadership of Coach Lee Blich, was and has been able to still provide significant recreational programs such as Youth Baseball, Softball, Football and Cheerleading. Through our programming, we were able to service almost 1,000 participants.

Our revitalization included a different programming direction for Parks and Recreation that would not only include a focus of the traditional sporting activities, but we would begin to **focus** on providing more outdoor recreational activities and amenities including chess, weight training, ping pong, corn-hole, and volleyball – all of which are outside and readily available to the public. Our continued investment in our Highway 29 Ballfields recreational activities provided the unique opportunity to do something different. I am so proud of our newest addition - the **Union City Skate Park**, where those who like to skateboard have a space to perform skating tricks and showcase their

talents. You never know, you may see your Mayor performing a gnarly kick flip or boardslide.

We have a community garden that is maintained by the Senior Citizen program at the Etris- Darnell Building located at the Ronald Bridges Park. The seniors continue to plant and harvest their own produce. We continue to feed the seniors through the daily nutrition program and the community garden as part of the Parks and Recreation programming initiative in partnership with Fulton County Senior Services. Our **R3** initiative focuses on major investments and improvements of outdoor trails and streams that will connect all of our parks with all of the Union City community.

Our **reclaim** zone has a primary focus on revitalizing our green spaces and the ecology that we hold dear to our community. It is well known that home values increase where there is an access to safe parks and pathways that will continue to transition our community into a walkable urban environment. These walkable environments encourage active lifestyles that encourage functionality, safety, and ultimately make our city more attractive. Walkable urban environments have also proven to reduce major health issues - like high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes, which have plagued our communities for far too long. As the progressive city, we strive to ensure that our collective efforts meet the needs of every citizen.

Everyone knows that the pulse of any city, are its people. Drewry Arthur Carmical and Charles Simon Barret, the two men credited with founding Union City, set out to create a thriving community which includes everyone's favorite restaurant, The Green Manor, and many other buildings located within what we know as the heart of Union City - Union Street. The second zone within our **R cubed** initiative, the **Renew** zone, will consist of enormous investments into our current downtown area and portions of Roosevelt Highway that will allow our city to become a dynamic and welcoming area for generations to come. While nourishing the identity that we have already established, the City Council and I are working to transform the existing conditions of our city center into a thriving thoroughfare that is safe and accessible for all. This includes the implementation of additional street lights and medians, small business retail centers, and additional spaces for quality living that will attract people from all walks of life to our city.

Our Public Works Department led by Lonnie Ferguson, works diligently to help us achieve this goal day in and day out. Under the leadership of Director Ferguson, the department has removed over 100 tons of trash, 5 tons of metal have been recycled and 250 tires have been removed from our streets which continues to ensure that our quality of living is not only sustained but improved in Union City. Our Spring and Fall Cleanup

events have allowed us to collect and dispose of these items as necessary. However, the onus is on all of us to keep a mindful eye of our habits as we travel throughout our city. This includes limiting littering and loitering, encouraging organizations to participate in our **Adopt-A-Spot** initiative, and working with homeowners to ensure that their properties are kept up to code. One aspect of the city that I am extremely grateful for is our beautiful Shannon Parkway Gateway that serves as a welcome to all residents and visitors who visit our great city. This will allow Union City to become more “people oriented” by promoting a sustainable urban environment which will serve as a **catalyst** for healthy growth throughout our city.

The Public Works Team works hard to serve many of the city’s functions that have a direct impact of the welfare and quality of life of our citizens and visitors. The department’s goal is to maintain, improve, and enhance these functions that include water, sewer, transportation network, and pedestrian and recreational facilities. Our Public Works team has accomplished much with the emphasis of utilizing resilient, sustainable, and innovative technologies. Further, the department spearheaded a utility maintenance program for all subsurface utilities. The utility systems which include stormwater, water distribution, and sanitary sewer infrastructure are inspected and programmed for maintenance and upgrades yearly. As a result of this program, Public Works replaced 110 water service lines, installed 3,000 linear feet of

“Cured In Place Pipe” (CIPP) lining, 30 linear feet of storm drain pipe, and 600 linear feet of gabion walls.

This past year, the renovations of Union City’s Mayors’ Park was selected by the Southeast Stormwater Association to be showcased as model of innovative green infrastructure urban design. Public Works is on a mission to reduce the amount litter, illegal dumping, and protecting the natural environment throughout the city.

Citizens are the department’s extras eyes when it comes to identifying and reporting issues like litter. Utilizing the “See Click Fix” app can instantly notify the departments for expedited remediation.

With the support the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, also known as TSPLOST, we can continue to provide funding for transportation improvements citywide. This includes congestion relief & roadway projects, sidewalk improvement projects, bridge maintenance, and other transportation related purposes. A few of the projects which we have completed using TSPLOST funding include: Street resurfacing of Highpoint Road, Bryant Street, Union Street, Watson Street, College Street, Alexander Street, Baker Street, and Union Pointe Drive

Now, if you witnessed the much-anticipated Shannon Parkway Gateway, that is just a premier of what’s to come as we move forward with the **R3** Master Plan. The Public Services Department will play a major role in

implementing enhancements in all three zones of the master plan. With the goal of improving the overall pedestrian experience, we look forward to the following projects that we know residents, as well as visitors, will enjoy as they encompass a variety of elements such as new streetscapes, multi-use trails, landscaping, lighting, and bicycle facilities.

And finally, my personal favorite, our third and final zone- the **Reimagine** zone. We often say that our children are the future. The children are our NOW. *The book of Hebrews 11:1 and 10 says; “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is GOD!!!”* With the opportunity to **reimagine** this part of the city, it is my belief that we have a duty to ensure that we leave the city in a more prosperous and flourishing state than which we found it - for not only our children, but their children as well. While there are certain parts of the initiative that focuses on key parts of the city, I like to think that we are continually reimagining how we do business in Union City. Within this zone, we will depend heavily on our Community Development staff who work tirelessly to bring new businesses and growth to our city each and every day. This includes firm investments in our ever-growing film community for directors, students and creatives who are interested in developing their next big hit right here in Union City. Union City’s economy has been and continues to be on an upward

trend regarding population growth as well and economic development. With the increase of both national and international corporations choosing to join the Union City community, we continue to bolster an economy that will sustain our community well into the future. We're encouraging our existing partners to expand their operations which will afford Union City the ability to provide quality, livable wage jobs to our residents. Costco Wholesale facility has completed a 50,000 square foot expansion and ASOS has announced a \$100 million dollar expansion of their facility.

This expanded economy has been a laborious movement where more than \$465 million dollars of investments have taken place here in 2021. These investments are made possible by the 1,300 residential and commercial permits issued by our Community Development Department. Additionally, there have been nearly 275 Certificates of Occupancy issued throughout the year.

We have a range of projects that are on the horizon – many of which have been sought after in our community including national coffee chains, mixed-use developments, and a diversity in shopping retailers. Our housing options are increasing as well including a mixed-use residential community, market rate multi-family communities, townhome communities and single-family communities.

In order to ensure we continue to deliver effective service to the Citizens of our City; we also must **reimagine** the way we deliver city services and engage our employees. With a change in the overall retention of employees due to higher numbers of employee transitions, our department of Human Resources has been committed to creating a strategy to recruit and retain the best. We have done this by implementing a Recruitment and Retention Plan to include a performance management overhaul and succession planning and initiatives, as well as engagement initiatives and a compensation restructure.

For example, during COVID-19, the City implemented virtual wellness engagement initiatives to ensure we remain in contact with our employees. Due to the success of these initiatives, Union City received the Outstanding Culture of Well Being Award from Cigna, recognizing our investment in creating a culture of wellness for our employees. In addition, we completed a Compensation Structure study to ensure we are compensating employees fairly, as well as remain competitive to attract the best candidates.

Another strategy we executed to attract outstanding candidates was to implement the recruitment campaign, “It Starts With Me”. This campaign was created by the Georgia Municipal Association to help address the growing talent acquisition and retention challenges faced by

Georgia's cities and focuses on the heartwarming side of working in city government. The campaign is specifically designed to attract and recruit within our community. Posters and flyers created for the campaign reflect the faces of our employees to build a connection and attract candidates within our community.

The City is committed to creating job opportunities for everyone. We have accomplished this goal by implementing a “**Ban the Box**” hiring policy. This policy seeks to promote qualified applicant pools by allowing skilled and motivated job applicants to participate in the hiring process without criminal history resulting in an automatic barrier to employment. Although it is the desire of the city to safeguard and promote the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens and employees, the City is committed to ensuring that qualified persons with criminal convictions are afforded City employment opportunities.

Not only are we looking to assist our employees, but we are primarily **focused** on ensuring our citizens are able to interact with our elected officials and city government in more efficient and effective ways. This fall we will roll out the much-anticipated Citizens Academy – sort of a UC-101 class. This class will give citizens an opportunity to better understand how municipal government truly works.

Through our Clerk's Office, we are able to continue serving our young people through the Union City Youth Leadership Council Program. This

past year, we were able to increase our recruitment of teenagers and installed 13 new members of the Youth Leadership Council at our December Council Meeting. These young people represent four different schools throughout South Fulton County and range from 10th to 12th Grades. We are so proud of the work they continue to do throughout our City.

As someone once said, “The road to success is always under construction.” And in Union City, we’re not only **focused** on building sidewalks and bridges, paving streets, filling potholes, and picking up trash. We’re focused on growth and the capacity to welcome folks from all across the world to our doorstep. Recently, we were able to review how much we have grown as we received data from the Census which is conducted every ten years. We are proud to have increased our population by eight percent and continue to welcome a diverse range of people to Union City. It’s no secret that a large part of our attraction is our proximity to the World’s Busiest Airport. And we are extremely grateful for the relationship that we continue to build with the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

While it is customary to lay out a vision for where we are going during the State of the City Address, it is important to realize and understand where we have been. The work that has been conducted over the past few years to navigate our city through a pandemic and the financial

troubles that once plagued our city is not lost on me. While I realize we can always perform better, it is quintessentially important to recognize the work of the folks who help us to make Union City, the Progressive City.

As Mayor, it is extremely important for our city to be financially sound and I am proud to report that the City Council and I passed an over \$86 million dollar budget this past August with \$13 million dollars set aside for financial reserves. We must continue to build our reserves. This budget includes almost \$40 million dollars in the general fund budget, this increase is more than double from where our city's general fund was a short five years ago. Our economy is growing, and our strategies are working. It is my priority that our finance department continue to implement sound financial principles and polices that produce cost savings for residents. I am proud of the work that we continue to do to leave Union City better than we found it.

One core strength of any city is their ability to protect their neighbors. I am proud to report that throughout a trying pandemic and a difficult time for frontline workers across the country, the men and women who proudly wear the Union City Badge on their chest... who keep our streets safe, who choose to protect and serve, who patrol our streets, who run into burning buildings when others are running out, who perform life saving measures for our residents, who ensure that homes in our

community follow the rules that are set... I would be standing here all day if you asked me to describe the tireless work that the men and women of the Police, Fire, and Code Enforcement departments perform. I am honored to be able to have the leadership of Police Chief Cassandra Jones and Fire Chief Joe Maddox. The work that they do to keep the people of Union City, our most valuable assets safe and healthy, are nothing short of amazing. There is an often-trending term that you hear people use and I am sure each of us has heard it... "Defund the Police." I am proud to declare that not only are we investing in our officers, we are investing in additional innovative technologies to ensure they have what is necessary to perform their duties effectively, and efficiently. Their safety, and the safety of all residents of Union City, are our utmost priority and I am extremely glad of the work each of you do. Our Fire Department stands ready at all times to assist any resident or visitor who requires attention. Recently, the department received the Life Saving Award from the American Red Cross for their work in Union City and the work that they provide to our sister cities. It is imperative that I recognize the members of the Union City Fire Department for their courageous acts and all they do to ensure that public safety is a priority here in Union City. Under the guidance of Fire Chief, Joe Maddox, UCFD celebrated a monumental year. The Fire Department responded to 7,487 calls of which 4,142 were Emergency medical calls and 3,345 were fire related. This was an increase of 9 percent over 2020.

The fire prevention division participated in numerous community events, conducted 111 home safety inspections, installed 105 smoke detectors and almost 200 car seats were installed through its partnership with Safe Kids of Georgia. This was accomplished in addition to their 600 inspections and investigative duties. We were extremely proud to note that the City celebrated the purchase of a new fire engine which has served as the primary engine at Station 42 located on Shannon Parkway; the new apparatus is a **Sutphen** with a capacity to deliver 1,500 gallons of water per minute. Engine 42 is the second **Sutphen** the city has purchased since 2018. And our growth doesn't end there. During 2021, we were glad to acquire the land necessary for soon to come, Fire Station 4. This will allow our city to be more responsive to the needs of our citizens.

The Police Department focused on following the guidelines of the 21st Century Policing while ensuring that our state certifications were maintained. By meeting the strict State Certification Standards, the department is able to reimagine the level of service the department provides the citizens of Union City. There were multiple leadership changes in the Uniform Patrol Division which allowed Chief Jones the ability to renew her vision for patrol. New leadership with fresh perspectives were put in place to continue the evolution from Traditional Policing to Community Oriented Policing. The Traffic Unit continues to provide visibility and enforcement in reclaiming our streets. One

highlight was their participation in a distracted driving campaign on State Route 138 where Union City Detectives and the Crime Suppression Team renewed their commitment to victims of crime by being responsive and engaging.

In the past year, the Police Department issued 8,875 citations, completed 4,561 incident reports, made 1,124 physical arrests and attended more than over 100 community events. The Code Enforcement team inspected 4,698 properties and issued 1,197 violation notices. Across the department, our officers spent 10,796 hours in training to ensure they could meet the needs of our citizens. And while we continued to recognize our officers, we made it clear that they are valued here – in Union City- by instituting a pay increase for our men and women in uniform. I am proud to report 15 new hires in the previous year, while adding and filling eight new roles within the department... all to ensure that we have every vacancy filled, to continue the mission of safety in our **focus!** The department was able to acquire state of the art equipment and technology for more efficiency and community enhancement including the: FARO Crime Scene processing machine, Milo Simulator to enhance community interaction and training officers, an Electronic Warrant System, an Intoximeter, numerous finger print scanners, and school zone speed safety signs and cameras to ensure that our youngest citizens will be safe..... (*May Discuss*) Our commitment to true community policing reflects the most current 21st century policing

methods and helps us continue to build trust throughout our community. We will keep Union City safe. While on the topic of safety, be on the look-out for an upcoming partnership with *Wheel-destrian*. This is a truly compassionate Partnership for Mobility, Innovation, and Inclusivity. *Wheel-destrian* creates a safe way for people with mobility limitations to safely cross intersections. **Helen Dowdell are you here? Please stand!!!**

Our Code Enforcement Unit was able to increase their focus on abandoned property and the upkeep of property throughout the City. The Code Enforcement Unit partnered with around forty plus Property Owners on Shannon Parkway and continues to partner with business owners to keep properties in compliance. This resulted in the removal of more than twenty (20) Dump Trucks of trash, which resulted in all Properties being in compliance with our City Ordinance. Code Enforcement issued more than thirty citations for Litter, Trash, and Unlawful Dumping. We will continue to ensure that owners maintain their property and take care of this place we call home.

Throughout 2021, the Court Services department had to implement parts of the **R3** initiative to reimagine the Court and access to justice through the pandemic. After implementing virtual court sessions in late 2020, the department held over 250 virtual court sessions. We also offered Solicitor pre-trial offers to those eligible with minor traffic violations,

ensuring that the pandemic case back log would not be vast. As many county facilities remained closed to the public or reduced services due to staffing shortages and after receiving an increasing amount of calls from the public with the need of information outside of the Union City jurisdiction, the Court department found a way to help the community with legal issues that were plaguing cities and counties across the nation. The department repurposed a vacant office, provided legal books and forms from the county courts and made the UC Community Resource Center available for access to the public.

In 2022, we are committed to growing the use of the UC Community Resource Center by offering *pro bono legal* assistance once a month to residents who need it. We will continue to enhance the virtual court abilities. Providing the virtual court option to out of state defendants and college students year round. We will also continue to develop our specialty courts including probation revocation, environmental, and youth court calendars as were planned for 2021.

As I close this evening, I want to leave you with this. It is a bright new day, in Union City. Folks, we're on the forefront of something truly magical. We have an amazing leadership team, team-members, and a community who are **focused** on moving our city forward. My commitment, as your Mayor, is this..... I will remain vigilant, and laser **focused** on the goals that we collectively have for our city. I will be

persistent in the pursuit of good governance and financial stability. I will remain steadfast in our engagement and advancement. *Scripture tells us, in the book of 1st Timothy, the fourth chapter, fifteenth verse tells us to “be diligent in our matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.”* And that is what I will continue to do. That is what **WE** will continue to do. We must remain **focused** on our destiny and the greatness that is before us. Thank you, Union City. I love you. May God Bless You, Our City, Our County, Our State, Our Nation, and our World. Now if you know me, you’ve heard me say this before. So say it with me... I love you, and there ain’t **NOTHING** you can do about it!!!!