



2019 State of the City

Banneker High School

Ladies and gentlemen, I can't begin to underscore how wonderful it is to see you tonight. You are the true spirit of Union City, and it is a moment of great privilege to be in your presence. I can feel the energy and support in this room, and I know history will long remember each of you for standing with us during a time of unprecedented opportunity.

Union City is my heart and this region is my soul. I take pride in the fact that every day both are becoming **more** and **more** resilient. I have been blessed five times to deliver this address and consider it an honor to share the state of our city--
-which, by the way, is **absolutely strong. UC Strong!**

I must begin by expressing my gratitude to our **faithful** host, Benjamin Banneker High School under the leadership of Dr. Duke Bradley. The leadership of Principal Duke Bradley and the Fulton County Board of Education raises the bar regarding college-to-career ready students. Others who give of themselves daily to

prepare our kids are champions in their own right, teachers of the year like Liberty Point Elementary **Mr. Gemayel Joiner**, and CH Gullatt Elementary **Ms. Ebony Johnson**, Professionals of the year from Liberty Point **Ms. Martina Franklin** and CH Gullatt **Ms. Aundrea Hammock**. We are facing a skills gap in Georgia and can either promote high-skill, high wage jobs here---or, let those jobs move to other places that take this work more seriously. Dr. Bradley and the Board understand this reality. Let's give them a round of applause for being an amazing host as well as for preparing our students for the workforce.

My wife Sharon and daughter Nia—Thank you for always being in my corner cheering me on! For holding my hand through this life and for the joy of being forever connected to you. And to my JCKSN Avenue family, there really aren't enough ways to show you how happy you make me. Please stand.

Mayor Pro Tem Angelette Mealing, Councilman Brian Jones, Councilwoman Christina Hobbs, and Councilwoman Shayla Nealy, please stand..... Thank you for understanding that the glue keeping us together is the reality of working for a cause **much bigger** and **greater** than us. Our secret sauce is that **none** of us are as smart as **all** of us. I appreciate you for being a **mighty** force, for our chemistry, and especially our diversity in thought. It makes us stronger. Better---and gives credence to the fact that when we move forward **together**, success will take care of

itself. **Oh by the way let us all extend HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

GREETINGS to Councilwoman Shayla Nealy!!!!!!!

Special thanks to all the other elected officials attending tonight. Please stand.

Collaboration is about being who you are and speaking what you see. Thank you for seeing the promise of not only Union City but **all** cities!

Leaders cannot lead without a team. We are blessed to work with individuals who wave the banner of UC high. Thank you Team for working to improve the quality of life for every person who comes through our doors and calls UC home. Our City Manager Sonja Fillingame, Assistant City Manager Tarsha Calloway, City Attorney Dennis Davenport, and City Clerk Shandrella Jewett. Our Police Chief Cassandra Jones, Fire Chief Joe Maddox, and Municipal Court Chief Judge Ronald Freeman. Our Department Directors, Lee Blich, Lonnie Ferguson, Ellis Still, Linda Goodman, and Kristie Collier—will you, please stand? Will **all** Union City TEAM-MEMBERS, please stand!!!! Members of our Authorities, Boards and Commissions, please also stand. Let's give them a round of applause.

Our vision is **progressive. Bold.** This journey and our fight for progress has been exciting to say the least. We call it **Progress 20/20**, because Union City is the progressive city. We are limited only by our imagination. It's a good thing that power is here in Union City, we are an exceptional city that is thriving. It's right

here in our hands, alive and well in our neighborhoods, where we live and work..
Where we pray.. And where we dream. If this past year has done anything, it has
reminded us to think big and go after what seems unreachable. **Am I Wrong?**

- Our proximity to the world’s busiest airport and pro-business culture is keeping us on the list for television and filming. **Am I Wrong? Progress 20/20.**
- We are working hard to brand ourselves including our newest goal of bringing more arts and culture to the City—because we want people to see our vibrancy. **Am I Wrong? Progress 20/20.**

We have been about the business of:

- improving our streets and park system
- promoting public safety
- and maintaining healthy financial reserves – **Am I Wrong? Progress 20/20**

Tonight, I offer this year’s State of the City address as a celebration of our collective accomplishments. We are blessed to be supported by citizens who care, who are engaged—whose actions say, *“I choose you, Union City. And I will choose you over and over again. Because I believe in you. I see your promise. And while sometimes the roads are tough, and we from time to time may not agree, I know that difficult roads lead to beautiful places.”*

Finance

We have worked hard to secure a strong financial position and develop a solid plan for the economic prosperity of Union City. Through sound practices, we have delivered a balanced budget and take pride in safeguarding assets, procuring services, revenue collection, and accounting.

The FY 19 Budget totaled \$67,080,908, which included \$29,290,801 for the General Fund. Our reserves are healthy, continue to increase, and positions us well in meeting the challenges of a municipal environment.

Parks and Recreation

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to report the doors of our newest, and first of several community centers, the Union City Gathering Place, is now open. A promise made and a promise kept!!! This facility has prime meeting space; our own gymnasium, theater and courtyard provide the backbone for UC connection. I said it last year, and I will say it again... What we know is that people are searching for a sweet spot. They want connection. They want culture, and they want community. The Gathering Place is the manifestation of our citizens' desire

to understand each other, focus on what brings us together, and to push forward through engagement, arts, culture and recreational programming.

The Council and I stand firm in our belief that our citizens deserve great parks. Just as fire safety, law enforcement, water, and sewer are critical public services,--- so, too, are parks. If you believe that parks should be inviting and places of acceptance, where everyone is welcomed regardless of their zip code or what they have-----then you must also believe there should be no difference between the quality of parks on the north side and parks on the south side. We want parks worthy of our great city and its citizens, and the Council and I are dedicated to making that happen.

This fiscal year, we have continued our efforts to upgrade our ballfields. A total of \$1,261,383 was dedicated for Phase II of our renovation project and will culminate in parking improvements, renovation of a secondary ballfield, landscaping, and the addition of a new pocket park, which will include outdoor gaming options.

I received an email from **Patrick Gillispie**. **Patrick**, will you stand? Patrick is 14 years old and a member of the National Junior Beta Club. *“I don’t really know how this process works”*, he wrote. *“But I think we really need a skate park. I am really good at skating, but people always tell me and my friends that we will never make a career out of it. There are kids my age who have nowhere to go and skate*

and not get kicked out.” Well Patrick, I read your email, and had the great pleasure of meeting with you and your family. I am proud to tell you that a skate park is coming to UC. You **will have** a place to go---and you **will not** get kicked out. **Deliver Skate Board!!!!!!**

We have citizens who enjoy actively walking at Mayor’s Park. However, after 20 plus years, the amenity is in dire need of renovation and a facelift. **I am pleased to report that funding was allocated by unanimous support of this elected body, to address improvements as well as aesthetics at Mayor’s park.**

We are also proud of the many other programs Parks and Recs executed this year:

- Thanks to our partnership with Fulton County, seniors have a location to socialize with each other and receive a hot meal five days a week; Additionally, to help them adapt to new technology, they have access to their very own computer center with internet availability
- Participation in our Community Health Day program has continued to rise; We provide access to free services including prescription medications, dental and eye exams, chiropractic services and so much more...
- There may not a hospital in the immediate area to date, but we’re excited to welcome the UC Urgent Care Facility guided by the skillful hands of Dr. Michael Obiekwe

- The Annual Back to School Backpack Rally delivers book bags and critical school supplies for children for the upcoming school year; There are many worries we have as parents, but affording a book bag for your child will not be one of them in UC
- Please know regardless of where you are in Union City, there will be a Park to serve you and your family

Thank you Director Blich. UC is Park Proud. **Am I Wrong?**

Economic Development

Ladies and gentlemen, if you are a municipality anywhere in America, you **MUST** keep current with the trends of the marketplace. We cannot say on one hand we want economic development and then on the other hand ignore the realities that drive it.

- It is **un-de-niable**. Consumption has experienced a titanic change; You can order an item online and have it at your door within two hours;
- Traditional brick and mortar retail shops are struggling and many are being downsized
- Express delivery services are replacing shopping trips with delivery trips

Look, it is no secret that Union City has taken criticism regarding some of the e-commerce development occurring within our borders. We've had deleterious commentary made to us and about us! But I submit to you that through it all, we

have pushed forward; remained positive; and looked in no other direction but full speed ahead. Shannon Mall and malls across the country, powerhouses like Toys R Us, Sears, Victoria Secrets, and most recently; Payless Shoes, have suffered the consequence of our ever-changing shopping trends. We understand the market realities that have caused people to walk on their front porch to pick up an amazon box or order products online. We didn't create those realities but we understand them. Just as we understand that if we want jobs in our communityIf we want a positive environment for business creation----we have to be competitive in the marketplace or those jobs **will** walk.

ASOS, Wal-Mart E-Commerce, Amazon, Coca Cola, Google, Kraft, P&G, DHL, KEURIG Green Mountain, Del Monte, General Electric, COSTCO, and CAT chose Union City. But even better, is the fact that **Pam Anderson, Kirstin McFarland, and Joseph Lewis**, all Union City residents, are employed because of these opportunities right here in Union City. They understand how important their jobs are and what they mean for their families and community.

Will you please stand?

We must build bridges, **not** burn bridges that bring us closer as a community.

The attraction of our location and ease of mobility are reasons Atlanta Metro Studios is expanding. Signing two five-year deals with **HBO and Netflix**, solidifies the power of the film industry in Georgia, and just think we get to play a huge role in

the equation. Our partnership with the Denton's TEAM, is a proposal to add more incentives in the form of a second Tax Allocation District and redevelopment plan, companies like Pratt and Whitney will certainly know they made the right choice to invest in Union City. **Progress 20/20.**

We have also partnered with John Portman and The Pendleton Group, and are working hard to elevate Union City's economic development strategies through the creation of a Master Development Plan. Also, our connection with Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance, Aerotropolis CID, South Fulton CID, and the Atlanta Regional Commission will keep us engaged with our neighboring municipalities so that we are intentional in ensuring we are plugged into opportunities at the local, regional and state levels.

Public Works

Everyday we count on our Public Works Team—be it for water, sewer, or street maintenance. They work hard to achieve success with limited resources, and it is my privilege to share a few of their highlights. Public Works:

- Maintained approximately (200) miles of Right of Way
- Inspected, cleaned, and repaired over 3,000 stormwater structures
- Reinvigorated our corridors with the construction of a series of new gateways; I remember a time when you could ride from College Park to

Palmetto and never know when you were in Union City; In 2019, that is no longer the case; **Am I Wrong Progress 20/20**

- Brought additional vibrancy to our community through our newest art piece, Wisdom Bridge; Thank you Fulton County Board of Commissioners, Director Lionel Thomas and the Fulton County Arts Council for assisting us!
- Additionally, the department commenced the following capital improvement projects:
 - Shannon Boulevard, Oakley Road, and Lakeside Drive Sidewalk Improvements
 - SR 138 and SR 14 Landscaping and Intersection Improvements ---this was a joint venture with the City of Fairburn and demonstrates the spirit of partnership
 - Dodson Road and Union Street Resurfacing, Sidewalk, and Drainage Improvements
 - Lester Road Sidewalk and High Point Pedestrian Improvements
 - Derrick Road Resurfacing
 - Citywide Pavement Markings Improvements
 - Peters Road Resurfacing

We are also excited about future improvements at Mason Road and South Fulton Parkway. TSPLOST projects are underway and will continue assisting our community with the work of resurfacing UC streets. It will also provide funds to help our strengthened partnership with **GDOT** and bring a badly needed diverging

diamond interchange to State Route 138. This is critical in reducing traffic on the corridor and improving operations at the interchange. **Am I Wrong? Progress**

20/20

Fire Department

Under the guidance of Fire Chief, Joe Maddox, UCFD celebrated a monumental year. \$841,000 was awarded in federal funding through the SAFER grant—providing critical assistance in hiring seven new firefighters. Additionally, the Council approved the hiring of four new full time and six part time firefighters through the general fund.

- We are proud to note the City celebrated the arrival and purchase of a new fire engine which will serve as the primary engine at Station 41 located on Highpoint Road; The new apparatus is a **Sutphen** with a capacity to deliver 1,500 gallons per minute
- Our first Citizen Emergency Response Team was formed in partnership with the South Wind subdivision; Will **you please stand?** CERT teaches citizens how to be prepared in an emergency; There are also future plans to develop a Fire Corps unit which is a FEMA based strategy bringing government and citizens together in all-hazards emergency preparedness
- Our fire prevention division participated in over 45 community events and installed 547 smoke detectors thanks to our partnership with the American

Red Cross; Will my Red Cross family please stand so that we can thank you for bringing the Sound the Alarm initiative to Union City and making our citizens safer in the process. (Applause) The fire prevention division also installed 247 car seats thanks to Safe Kids of Georgia. Safe Kids TEAM, please stand. Hats off to you and especially **Ms. Angela Johnson** for doing yeoman's work in addressing preventable injuries of our kids; and keeping them safe at all times!

- We have entered into an Automatic Aid agreement with the City of South Fulton supporting enhanced emergency response times in both communities.
- Nominated by the City of Fairburn, Battalion Chief Andy Dillard, Lt. Brian Fisher, FF/Paramedic Willie Kee and Firefighter EMT Christopher Stevens were honored by the **Ronnie Thames Foundation** and received the **2018 Silent Hero's Award for Team Work**. Will you please stand and be recognized for demonstrating a level of public service we can all be proud of?

Police Department

Our police department was exceptionally busy over the past year under the leadership of Chief Cassandra Jones. The department continued its goal of meeting new state certification requirements by the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police. Certification is a progressive and time-proven way of helping law enforcement agencies calculate and enhance their overall performances. UCPD's command staff updated policy and procedures, supervised construction projects required for

certification, updated the rank structure and chain of command, and adjusted training requirements.

We want to send a message that says our police department is part of our community and our community is part of our police department. That is why our COPS unit attended over one hundred twenty community events and business meetings including homeowners associations, crime suppression programs and school functions. UCPD held its second annual “Camp 911” with youth participating in a week-long summer camp and “National Night Out” which is a nationwide initiative connecting public safety and members of the public.

In addition to performing community outreach, officers worked hard to protect our citizens and ensure individuals responsible for committing crimes receive justice. During 2018, UCPD completed 6,142 incident reports and responded to 2,110 motor vehicle accidents. Additionally, approximately 6,000 written and 225 warning citations were issued. Officers made 1,068 physical arrests during the year. Code Enforcement, which also falls under Chief Jones, performed 2,463 inspections and wrote 585 written notices for violations. Personnel received a combined total of 7,936 hours of law enforcement training. Lastly, I am pleased to report the City Council and I approved a total of five new patrol positions.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for allowing us to highlight our work and share our story. *Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. left this with us, “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right!”*

We want you to know the state of Union City is **strong**. We have a vision. **Progress 20/20**. We have goals. **Progress 20/20**. And as we achieve those goals, we will continue to reach for new ones. **Progress 20/20**. That’s how we grow UC---by reaching for the things we cannot yet see. UC we’re just getting started, don’t get comfortable with what you see, and don’t get discouraged by what you don’t see. This is not an episode of the haves, and the have nots!!! This is about quality of life for us all!!!!

The Bible says: “Two people are better than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble!!!”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Folks, Union City is **OPEN FOR BUSINESS** and ready for the **Progress20/20! I’ve made this next statement countless times.**

“It’s time to remove the Mayberry mindset and mentality.” Union City,
GOD doesn’t just want us to get by, **GOD’S Plan** is for us to Prosper! We
must remain positive and not allow anyone to trap us in the “knots”----by telling us
“we are not”, we “cannot” or we “will not”. We may fall seven times-But you can
best believe the spirit of Union City **will-make-us- get-up-8**. Because we have
been there before and learned in the process that there are plans for Union City---
Plans to prosper and not harm. Plans to give hope and a future. **Am I wrong?**
GOD bless Union City! **Am I Wrong?** GOD bless the State of Georgia! **Am I**
Wrong? And, GOD bless America!

Thanks Everyone Good Night!!!!!!!!!!