

THE AKRON PRESS CLUB PRESENTS
SUMMIT COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ILENE SHAPIRO



STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

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The John S. Knight Center • 77 E. Mill St., Akron



ILENE SHAPIRO
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



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Good afternoon and welcome.

Joining us today demonstrates your interest and commitment to our community and to the Akron Press Club. As a backbone of our society, a free press plays a critical role of informing and engaging our community. Providing scholarships to emerging journalism students to continue this hard work is impressive and we thank the Press Club for leading this effort.

Please join me in thanking our interpreters, Kaylee Horn and Julia Coulman from the Greenleaf Family Center and thanks as always to Gregg Mervis and the entire staff here at the John S. Knight Center. What an asset we have in not only this facility, but in the hands and hearts that make it go. And thanks to ReWorks once again for partnering with us to make today a zero-waste event.

As you entered the space today, you were greeted by a beautiful display of fine art, celebrating the Summit County Black Artists Guild—a program developed and curated by Arts Now and championed by Nicole Mullet and Dara Harper. Thank you all for your work in making this event open and accessible.

It's nice to see so many of our elected officials in attendance today. I am humbled by and grateful for your presence and partnership. My esteemed colleagues serving Countywide, local mayors and trustees, our Statehouse delegation—thank you for your work on behalf of over 540,000 Summit County residents.

Today is about looking back and moving forward. The past few years brought both challenges and opportunities. It is what we chose to do with those challenges that makes us stronger. We started with what needed to be done. Then, we moved on to doing what was possible and, ultimately, we found we could do things we never dreamed of and today, we stand stronger for it.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, I declared a state of emergency and my administration immediately sprung into action. We took a tactical approach in identifying our community's most pressing needs. We then engaged a wide range of partners to assist. From our Emergency Management Agency Staff doing a community wide collection of PPE, to the immediate creation of an initial \$1.5 million small business grant fund, Summit County led the way during some of the most uncertain days of our recent history. This led to the federal government's first infusion of funds to local communities. In April of 2020, Summit County received \$94 million in CARES Act funding. Given the economic uncertainty that came with everything that Covid touched, this money provided a lifeline to our community. But, the money came with strings—only 8 months to spend it and federal guidance on the use of funds was slow to develop.

My administration could have viewed this as an impediment. Instead, we chose to move forward with determination and lightning speed. Our local investments needed to have clear guidelines, open application periods, review processes, and audit standards. We immediately went to work on all of this and began soliciting partner agencies from across the County to help. Fast forward to today and I'm proud to share some of the impact of our CARES funding:

- \$12 million in local small business grants to over three thousand small businesses
- \$4 million in non-profit and arts organization grants
- \$7 million in reopening or technology funds to all 17 Summit County public school districts
- \$22 million in direct support to all 31 communities, the University of Akron, and the Summit County Sheriff's Office to ensure continuity of services for first responders
- \$16.7 million in Emergency assistance for rent, mortgage, and utilities

But what does this really mean?

It means that over 3,000 small businesses—ranging from sole proprietors to businesses with 30 employees stayed open, kept their lights on and their staff working. It means that more than 100 vital nonprofits were able to stay afloat. These nonprofits are part of the social construct that fills gaps for many folks in need and also keeps our community vibrant. It means that 74,000 public school kids and their teachers were able to safely continue their work together. It means that all 31 communities were able to keep their safety forces fully staffed, and in turn, enabled our communities to remain safe. It means that thousands of families stayed in their homes. Spending \$94 million in six months sounds like a good problem to have, but, it was a challenge and one we could not do without help. The money was necessary, but the relationships were critical.

We needed partners to assist in distributing these funds to the community as quickly as possible. And, when I tell you our partners showed up, in force, it cannot be overstated. This is some of the most impactful, collective work we have ever done in this County. I want to thank Steve Millard and his team at the Greater Akron Chamber for their collaboration with us on deploying these small business grants. Jim Mullen and the team at United Way, specifically 2-1-1, have been integral in providing assistance, enabling residents to stay in their homes and keep their utilities on. John Petures and the team at the Akron Community Foundation were incredible partners as we worked together to ensure the survival of our nonprofit and arts organizations. And, to the many other community partners, like Malcolm Costa at Community Action, the Battered Womens Shelter, Mustard Seed, Community Legal Aid who answered our call for assistance, my sincerest thanks.

Now I want to offer special recognition to Summit County Public Health. Health Commissioner Donna Skoda is here with us today, and on behalf of a very grateful 540,000 residents, thank you Donna—and your entire team. Your steady and ready response to helping us navigate uncharted territory during this crisis was exceptional, and you are deserving of every thanks. At the onset of the pandemic, the County enabled much of our staff to work safely from home. For those whose work was deeply impacted or interrupted, we created a temporary county department to assist the community with Covid response and deployed workers both in county buildings and in the community. We had folks who were case workers helping to sanitize the courthouse. Probation officers working at the Akron Zoo to help them reopen and operate safely. County employees answered the call from the Board of Elections to assist with a healthy and safe election. And, most importantly, *we did not lay anyone off as a result of the pandemic.*

During that time the confidence placed in Council and my staff to devise and implement emergency plans and contingency methods is something for which I am so grateful. I would ask County Council to please stand and be recognized. Council President Elizabeth Walters, Vice President Veronica Sims, John Donofrio, Erin Dickinson, Christine Higham, Jeff Wilhite, Rita Darrow, John Schmidt, Gloria Rodgers, Tony DeVitis, Bethany McKenney—thank you all for your collaboration.

At the same time, while we were in the deepest waters of the pandemic, we were still building the lighthouse to find our way through the opioid epidemic. We were experiencing an epidemic inside a pandemic.

In the fall of 2019, Summit County received a historic settlement—the largest in US history—from the pharmaceutical industry as the result of the assertive litigation we filed with community partners in 2017. Selected as the bellwether plaintiff, Summit County led the United States in holding big pharma responsible for the plague they inflicted upon so many of our residents, our neighbors, our families. In an effort to invest those funds in the most meaningful way, I convened stakeholders to look at the abatement plan approved by the federal court. Joined by Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan, Public Health Commissioner Donna Skoda, Barberton Mayor Bill Judge, and Coventry Township Trustee George Beckham, we appointed 17 subject matter experts to the Summit County opioid abatement advisory council. Joined by County Council, we have invested million dollars into services aimed to directly assist those who are battling opioid use disorder and addiction.

Together, we have invested nearly one million dollars in the Akron Community Foundation to support local organizations who are truly on the front lines of the helping our community; over two million dollars to support pregnant women who are addicted with wraparound services called Centering through local healthcare providers; six million dollars in life saving medications provided directly to the community from manufacturers; and two and a half million dollars to fund emergency room services that treat addiction like the health crisis it truly is. A person who is in crisis can walk through the ER doors at Summa Health or Cleveland Clinic Akron General and be treated for this medical condition without judgement.

With the resources available, the leadership at the ADM board, and the support of our community, Summit County is leading the state and the country with a progressive vision in the way we treat addiction and recovery. However, we recognize that there is still much work to do. We are in the process of selecting a vendor to build and implement a data platform that will connect treatment providers, hospitals, the criminal justice system and others to more efficiently and effectively support residents in crisis. This platform will allow individuals to access their own information and will allow providers to identify gaps in service and understand why we continue to lose too many of our loved ones each year.

I also want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that treatment does work and people do get better. If you or a loved one needs assistance, please call the crisis line at ADM or call 211 for immediate assistance. This community is so much better with you in it and there are people here in Summit County who stand ready to help.

These settlement funds must be invested in a meaningful way that will assist our community for generations to come. To that end, my team is working on a plan to utilize these funds to establish an endowment intended to ensure long term benefits for our community for years to come. We want to make sure these funds live on in perpetuity and provide us the ability to implement new and innovative programs in the field of addiction treatment and recovery.

The data platform I just outlined is one of the many ways we are using innovative technology to move the county forward. Since taking office, my team and I have led the charge to update and advance County operations. This intentionality has been most noticeable in our public safety operations. We are working with local officeholders and many of our communities to enhance public safety throughout Summit County.

In October 2019, we led Akron, Cuyahoga Falls, Fairlawn, Green, Stow, Tallmadge and the University of Akron and the Sheriff's Office in acquiring and implementing a state-of-the-art consolidated 9-1-1 dispatch system. Today, this next generation 9-1-1 system is keeping our community safe with advanced functionality that improves response times and provides critical pre-arrival information to better prepare first responders. The collective cost savings over the first 5 years of acquiring and maintaining the system will be nearly \$9 million. The success of the 9-1-1 project set the stage for communities to further enhance public safety in Summit County with the formation of a regional dispatch operation.

The County, alongside Cuyahoga Falls, Fairlawn, Stow and Tallmadge will jointly own and operate a state of the art 9-1-1 dispatch center, which is currently under construction in Tallmadge. The center will help save valuable time when the need to contact agencies for mutual aid arises and will eliminate the need to transfer of 9-1-1 calls between participating jurisdictions. It also enables the communities to leverage purchasing power to provide training, and resources, including NextGen 9-1-1, which will allow sending text and video to 9-1-1. With the City of Akron set to house its dispatch operations at the new center, the Tallmadge facility will collectively be the county's largest Public Safety Answering Point, serving over 300,000 County residents. As with everything we do in the County, this is an "opt-in project," leaving the option open for other communities to join in the future.

Another collaborative initiative is our work with the City of Akron, the University of Akron, and FairlawnGig to launch a public safety monitoring network in the neighborhoods located just south of the University for the benefit of students, residents, and businesses. The network will first launch as a two-year pilot program during which time the partners will design and construct the network. When operational, we will monitor the network, engage the businesses and residents residing in the South of Exchange Neighborhood, gather data to validate the impact of the project and report the results of the project. It is our intent that this project will be a model available to other communities that wish to increase their public safety initiatives.

Our focus on technology was sharpened in the early days of COVID-19. We, like others, moved some operations to digital meeting platforms. After receiving our CARES Act funding, we quickly identified the justice system as a key priority. We partnered with FairlawnGig to connect our criminal justice and public safety agencies to this high-speed, secure network and facilitate virtual proceedings. My division of public safety and my administrative services division led a collaboration with the Common Pleas Court, the Sheriff's Office, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Clerk's Office in pioneering a virtual courtroom platform.

The virtual courtroom eliminates the need for deputies to transport inmates to and from the courthouse, decreasing costs and increasing public safety. Through high-quality videoconferencing between the jail and courts we are reimagining how we operate, saving time and money, and boosting safety for both deputies and inmates. As we prepare to fully implement the virtual courtroom, work is underway on finalizing coordination and logistics between the jail, courts and outside agencies. When this system is operational, it will benefit all participants in our criminal justice system. The virtual courtroom is one of several technology projects we are implementing. Thank you to the Judges of the Common Pleas Court, Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh, Sheriff Fatheree, and Clerk of Courts Sandra Kurt for your willingness to adapt under unprecedented conditions.

Keeping the safety of those interacting with the criminal justice system as a priority, we also made an investment to modernize the Adult Probation Department. We purchased a new software called Outreach Smartphone Monitoring for felony offenders on probation. This software facilitates real time video check-

in, sends alerts and calendar notices, and provides other state-of-the-art features. This practical solution holds offenders accountable while providing the opportunity to maintain employment without the need to report to in-person appointments. It protects the health and safety of both probation workers and individuals on probation while maintaining the level of supervision to necessary to ensure public safety.

To further enhance the improvements in our courtrooms, we also worked with Sheriff Fatheree to launch a new jail case management system in April. This new system streamlines and improves day to day functionality of inmate management, benefitting inmates, Sheriff staff and Court operations. It enables greater communications and information sharing throughout the criminal justice system. The system provides judges the ability to make more wholistic and prioritized decisions as they look at sentencing and prisoner flow through the jail.

Finally, tying our criminal justice efforts and financial software together will be a new, online attorney billing system for court-appointed attorneys who ensure every person's constitutional right to representation. These attorney billings have long been a state-wide challenge and a source of frustration for our finance staff, the courts, and the attorneys themselves. It's a process mired in boxes and boxes of paper which need reviewed, passed around for signatures, and sent to Columbus for reimbursement. In partnership with the Ohio Public Defender's Office, we have begun the process of implementing this system, which eliminate the processing of thousands of checks every year, reduce our workload, and improve the speed at which these attorneys are paid.

In early 2022, my team launched the transition to a new enterprise-wide technology platform. This solution is designed to consolidate and manage the County's core functions, including financials, procurement, human resources, time keeping, scheduling, payroll and fixed asset management. This system will replace several antiquated systems and streamline multiple county functions. My team and I appreciate the cooperation and confidence we have received from all of our County offices as we undertake this transition. I want to give a special thanks to County Fiscal Officer Kristen Scalise and her team who are so crucial to this implementation and the management of our finances.

As you know, we are all a product of our experiences. We come to what we do with skills, knowledge and talents that have evolved over years. I am no different. When I first joined County Council, and later assumed the role of County Executive, I carried my longstanding engagement and commitment to economic and workforce development my office. As an entrepreneur and corporate executive, I learned the importance of collaboration between government and business across a variety of sectors.

I know what building a thriving business community means for our future. I know firsthand the difference a good paying job can make in the life of a single mother, a first-generation college graduate, or an immigrant now calling our county home.

With our partners, we've developed an infrastructure that includes weekly meetings and communications to retain, attract, and grow businesses. When the County is at the table as a convenor, a funder, an advisor, and everything in-between, we are contributing our vision and our expertise to the advancement of Summit County. Whether it's providing sewer for development, financial incentives, workforce training, or through the variety of tools in our toolbox, we are working hand-in-hand with our partners and communities every day.

I am proud of this community, and what it is accomplishing. Thank you to all the mayors and trustees and their teams who are working to move their communities forward and in turn, our County forward. The County's role varies greatly depending on the specific project. In some we are very actively engaged and in others we support in spirit. I share the same level of enthusiasm regardless of our role. So, what does this mean for your neighborhood? Let me tell you a little bit about what's happening around Summit County.

In downtown Akron, we are now greeted with a Main Street re-envisioned by Mayor Horrigan and his team at the City for residents, commuters, and visitors alike. Thanks to the hard work of the City of Akron, Summit County Development Finance Authority, the Summit County Land Bank, TeamNEO, and my team, we see residents and businesses moving into historic, renovated buildings at The Bowery, the Law Building and Canal Place. This is more than \$100 million invested in downtown Akron. The County joined the Knight Foundation, the Ohio and Erie Canal Way, the City and others in providing financial support for the Civic Gateway, which is the transformation of Lock 3 into downtown's Central Park. In Firestone Park, my Department of Sanitary Sewer Services is nearing completion on a new service center, anchoring jobs in that community. This will bring the County's investment in Firestone Park to over \$36 million. To the south, Bridgestone is expected to complete the construction of its new racecar tire manufacturing facility across the street from its Technical Center. In West Akron, Alpha Phi Alpha Homes broke ground on a new neighborhood housing project. The Summit County Land Bank is playing a significant role in this \$22 million project that will bring 89 new homes to this 16-acre site. The Residences at Good Park will attract hundreds of residents to the city. Through these public and private investments from many different partners, I can proudly tell you that significant investments are being made in Akron, the largest city in our County.

Heading down to Green, we are working with Mayor Neugebauer and his team to build infrastructure that will support commercial expansion at Union Square and residential expansion at Southwood Drive. In Coventry, we are excited to see Gardner Pie expand to a larger, new facility, a \$27 million investment financed by the DFA. In Northfield Center, we provided a grant to the trustees for their Safety Center Project. In Peninsula, we joined County Engineer Alan Brubaker to secure emergency funding from the Ohio Public Works Commission for the relocation and repair of Akron-Peninsula Road, an investment of over \$1 million.

Additionally, my department of Sanitary Sewer Services, the EPA, and the City of Hudson are working together on a \$7.5 million project to bring water and sewer services to Peninsula. This will help to solve longstanding economic development and environmental protection issues in the village. In Boston Township we are undertaking similar work, repairing roads and extending sewer infrastructure. In Cuyahoga Falls, we dedicated workforce development funding to help Kyocera SGS Tool consolidate its operations throughout the County into a newly renovated facility. The Summit County Land Bank is also working with the City of Cuyahoga Falls to bring new apartments to Front Street, a \$15 million investment. In Richfield and Richfield Township, the County assisted with financing the extension of Columbia Road to allow for the building of the new Best Buy distribution center, which created 200 jobs. In Fairlawn, the DFA financed a portion of the new Crystal Clinic Orthopedic Center facility. This specialty hospital is becoming a regional provider. In Stow, we are seeing a one million square foot industrial park become a destination for business, creating new jobs and opportunities. Assistance from the County, the City of Stow, JobsOhio and DFA provided infrastructure and capital lease funding. This industrial park has already added 400 jobs and continues to grow. In Norton, we provided County funds to match a state grant to

make much needed improvements to Eastern Road to foster development. Norton also saw partnership with the DFA on the Brookside Greens residential development. In Boston Heights, the County invested over \$750,000 for sewer infrastructure to expand the Arhaus warehouse and distribution center.

Bringing it back to the City of Akron, at the historic Akron Airdock we are excited to welcome LTA Research, an airship company that has brought good paying jobs and investment to the city, while also reviving its historic legacy. LTA plans to launch its first airship in California in the coming year. The re-use of the airdock and the work being done by LTA is symbolic of the community's ability to adapt and re-invent itself. The partnership between the DFA and The City of Akron on the LTA project is illustrative of the close work this community has come to count on from all of us. I would like to publicly thank Mayor Horrigan for his service to and vision for the City of Akron. I look forward to working with the mayor in the coming months to ensure the continued success of city-county collaborations.

As you can see, the County, the DFA, the Land Bank, TeamNEO, Ohio Means Jobs, the State of Ohio, the federal government, our cities, villages, and townships, private businesses, our schools and universities—notably Stark State and the University of Akron--non-profits, and many more are all coordinating their efforts to make Summit County prosperous and prepared for the future. *We could not have done all this without all of you.*

As you've heard, the financing incentives and opportunities provided by the DFA are numerous and today we are announcing one more. The County and the DFA are introducing a \$2 million Commercial Energy Efficiency Loan Fund. Both the County and the DFA have already committed future dollars toward a \$3 million goal. This fund will provide loans to businesses for energy efficient improvements. It adds a valuable tool in our arsenal of available to assist with business retention and attraction.

A strong relationship with the DFA enables us to support businesses and residents in a variety of ways. In addition to working with the DFA on financing for large projects, we also embarked on a ground breaking initiative to address a gap my team identified for our local minority contractors. When I first took office, it was with intentionality that I formed the County's first Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council. I asked this group to look at areas for improvement for minority participation in County operations in employment, procurement, boards and commission, and community involvement. From that work, it became clear that we needed to do more to assist minority businesses with the ability to grow and expand their businesses. From that, the Minority Contractor Capital Access Program, known as MCCAP was born.

Working with the City of Akron and the DFA's Western Reserve Community Fund through the leadership of Chris Burnham and Rachel Bridenstine, MCCAP offers working capital loans at no interest, underwriting for bonding requirements, and wraparound business services provided by The Akron Urban League under the direction of Teresa LeGrair. In less than two years participants in the program have secured 169 new contracts totaling \$2.8 million in revenue. MCCAP has not had a single business default on repaying their loans and is now beginning work with a third cohort. This is truly a life changing program and is helping businesses to grow and stand on their own. All of this stems from investments from the County and the City of Akron at \$1.4 million and \$500,000, respectively. This is yet another example of how working collaboratively and creatively can drive tangible results.

My own reflection on diversity, equity and inclusion and the community's focus on historical inequity has been heightened over the last several years. In 2020, Summit County Council declared Racism as a Public Health Crisis. Thank you to Council President Walters and Vice President Sims for your leadership in

spearheading this effort. With that, a fresh review of our internal operations began which prompted us to ask ourselves, “How can we further promote equity within our workplace in the Executive’s Office?” When it comes to this topic, the Executive’s Office must be lead by example *before* we ask others to join us. With the input of experts and employees, our Office will continue to work to ensure we offer equitable pay and inclusive training and opportunities for our staff. We will continue to look critically at how our hiring and procurement practices to help ensure we are truly being diverse, equitable and inclusive in how we operate.

My commitment is also mirrored in our ongoing work with The Urban Institute. In 2020, Summit County was selected as one of only eight counties in the United States to embark on a journey to help boost upward mobility out of poverty for low-income residents. With quality data and a strong coalition, we are focusing on advancing mental health and juvenile justice in our communities. And once again, I’m starting with my own office by implementing Mental Health First Aid Training for my staff.

Rounding out our examination not only of who we are as a community, but who we are going to be in the future, it cannot be denied that Summit County is getting older. We know that older residents will make up 30% of our population by 2030 and we need to prepare to ensure that our residents can enjoy our parks, access healthcare, and age in the place of their choosing. With the help of a diverse group of partners and Direction Home we are doing just that. Age-Friendly Akron Summit, an AARP 5 year model for making our community friendlier to older adults is under way. Since 2020, our office has worked alongside community leaders to hear from each city, township and village on how to make our County more accessible and inclusive to older adults.

Racism as a Public Health Crisis, Upward Mobility, Age Friendly—all three of these initiatives involved intentional and deep collaborations with folks from across Summit County. We heard from thousands of residents through surveys, focus groups, and advisory boards. From CEOs to incarcerated youth, from elected officials to local artists, from school teachers to retirees, we see and hear that there is more to equity than money.

Focusing on residents, combatting a pandemic, navigating an epidemic, creating opportunities for businesses—it all takes hard work, intentionality and resources. But, most of all—it takes people. Summit County faces the same struggles as other workplaces with replacing retiring individuals and those who simply have changed course. Summit County, through the Summit-Medina Workforce Investment Board, is also helping those folks who are looking to pivot to a new career. During the time period of July 2020 to June 2022, five times the number of job seekers compared to pre-pandemic numbers sought training grants for various in-demand occupations.

I am thrilled to announce that during this time we trained hundreds of Summit County residents through 32 training provides in 27 industry recognized programs expending \$623,000 for adults and dislocated workers. The top three credentials earned were Commercial Diver Licenses, IT certifications, and healthcare certifications. Thank you to Stark State and the University of Akron for working to build our skilled labor force. Our employer engagement efforts resulted in twice the number of new hire placements using our On-The-Job training incentives. This incentive reimburses employers for half of the new hire’s wages during a set training period. This form of training then tripled during the second year of the pandemic from the pre-pandemic numbers.

Our efforts in workforce development brought in special grants from the U.S. Department of Labor totaling nearly \$1.2 million. These grants assisted with business services, a collaborative research project

to understand worker sentiments during the pandemic, and other initiatives to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and opioid epidemic.

In addition to helping people build skills and find jobs, we continue to provide safety net services to our most vulnerable residents. These services put our residents in a position where they don't have to make choices about whether to buy their medication or buy groceries, whether to pay their utility bills or fix their windows, whether to take a promotion or keep their food assistance benefits. The Summit County Executive's Office's programs and services help residents avoid having to make these hard decisions. We provide home weatherization, utility assistance, lead abatement, minor home repairs, food assistance, Medicaid enrollment, childcare assistance, summer youth employment, adult protective services, non-emergency medical transportation, homeless prevention, and so many other critical services. Our programs like home weatherization are literally putting money back in the pockets of our residents.

Last year alone, over one billion dollars flowed through Summit County Job and Family Services to fund Medicaid and to support social and career development services that address basic needs while helping people transition to sustainable financial independence. My teams at the Departments of Community Development and Job and Family Services are truly on the frontlines assisting residents during their most challenging times—even when there isn't a pandemic. The challenges presented by the COVID pandemic were certainly significant.

You've heard me say over the years that we operate Summit County government on the lowest County sales tax rate in the State of Ohio. For the decade that followed the Great Recession, we never seemed to have two extra nickels to scrape together, were constantly cutting expenses everywhere we could, and saw our workforce diminish by nearly 1,000 employees over time. Through it all we prioritized fiscal responsibility. And then 2020 arrived, and while trying to navigate a global pandemic, the County found itself in an unfamiliar position: we were being sent federal aid. This federal aid had strings attached, but it was assistance, nonetheless.

As I mentioned before, we spend over \$90 million in roughly six months, and just as we wound down the majority of the CARES Act-funded programs, the federal government passed the American Rescue Plan and sent us another \$104 million. This new funding has very different uses than the previous round, and we immediately began to look at using these funds in a transformational way. We needed to transition our thinking from tactical to strategic.

From the onset of the pandemic our reliance on internet service was unparalleled, and it became clear that the digital divide not only impacted school children, but businesses, non-profits, and, significantly, our public safety. To that end, Summit County is endeavoring to build a fiber ring around our communities, connecting all 31 communities' public safety services so that in the event of a crisis, our community can remain safe and operational on its own high speed and secure network.

"Summit Connects" is a visionary plan designed to set us apart and grow our County by truly connecting communities and individuals. When completed, Summit Connects will give our County a competitive advantage which will place us at the top of the list for businesses investing in a community that is safe and technologically advanced. Our investment in high-speed fiber and a publicly owned and operated data center brings with it the ability to incentivize private internet services providers who will deliver service to homes and businesses across to the 31 communities across the County. Our objective with this project is to ensure that every resident and business can purchase reliable, high-speed connections at an affordable price.

The use of these one-time funds check so many boxes for our vision of what Summit County can be, conquering the digital divide and providing access to students who desperately need it; connecting older

adults with telehealth and other critical services; attracting new businesses and technologies to the region; enhancing public safety; and allowing for communities to initiate more robust responses to gun violence and crime.

All 31 communities and all 17 of our public school districts have met with us to collaborate on this project. Just this week we released a request for proposals for internet service providers who are interested in working with us to form a public-private partnership. This project is an unprecedented undertaking by County government. In total, we estimate nearly \$400 million of public and private sector investment will be leveraged to fulfill our vision. We could not do this without the collaboration of the City of Fairlawn under the thoughtful leadership of Mayor Bill Roth. Thank you to Mayor Roth for having an early vision for the FairlawnGig and demonstrating that local governments can truly meet the needs of residents and businesses.

This ARPA funding is also a once in a lifetime opportunity to cure some of the infrastructure problems we have faced for decades. Together, with the Summit County Engineer's Office, we have created a much-needed Stormwater District. The district includes the City of Reminderville, the county's nine townships and three of our villages. After decades of stalling out, this idea will now move forward with the investment of over \$19 million in construction and development projects in the participating communities. Once again, the County brought communities to the table and helped create a shared vision to remedy a long-standing issue.

For more than a decade, local governments in Ohio have been gutted by cuts to the local government fund in the state budget. Despite this, through recession and pandemic alike, we have remained fiscally sound. However, we have rarely been in a position to make investments like the ones outlined today. With headlines of a possible recession and folks watching interest rates rise, it's important that you know all this work has been done while leaving our rainy-day fund intact. We have done it while maintaining our outstanding bond rating and, frankly, garnering the respect of counties statewide and nationwide for our progressive and collaborative nature in investment.

I know this sounds like a lot—*it is*. The work the County does on social justice issues, on economic development and workforce, and on community collaboration is not always headline grabbing, but it is foundational to supporting our communities as a strategic partner, a convenor, and a facilitator. Businesses, hospitals, universities, elected and community leaders count on the County's leadership, vision, financial responsibility, and a combination of creativity and regulatory adherence to make things happen. Today, I have only scratched the surface of the depth of service and support Summit County has provided over the past three years.

What I want to leave you all with is a profound sense of gratitude for my Executive Office staff and all County employees. When there is commentary on those who work for a government entity, it is not always positive. But let me tell you: I have worked with CEOs of large corporations, presidents of prestigious universities, elected leaders at all levels, so believe me when I say the dedication shown by Summit County employees is unparalleled.

In a time where people all over the world were asked to do small acts of service to support the well-being of the public—wear a mask, stay home if you're able, get vaccinated, show kindness—it put a spotlight on the value and dignity of true public service. While folks squared off about minor inconveniences, true public servants showed up, and they showed up right here in Summit County. They collected PPE and distributed it to nursing homes. They worked with local churches and organized transportation to the County vaccination clinic. They pivoted from their comfort zone and took on the challenge of distributing

rent and utility assistance. They pioneered a vision for this community that will provide a legacy of technological achievement and level the playing field for everyone from grade school students to businesses. No matter what role you play in public service, I'd like to ask all public servants here today to stand and be recognized for your distinguished service. Everyone, please join me in thanking Summit County's public servants.

Lastly, I want to personally thank Summit County employees, our local nonprofit agencies, health care systems, higher education institutions, businesses, local leaders and residents for *your* collaboration, *your* patience, and *your* willingness to say yes to new ideas. *The State of Summit County is strong because the people of Summit County are strong.* I am proud to lead a remarkable team of public servants who make our incredible community better, safer, and more hopeful than ever before.