

2025 State of Summit County Address
Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro
October 1, 2025

Thank you all for joining me today at our 2025 State of Summit County.

Each year, we gather as a community to discuss where we have been, where we are, and where we are headed.

The Akron Press Club invites me to deliver this address as part of their fundraising efforts to provide scholarships to journalism students. In an age where your refrigerator can tell you the weather, but people still argue over basic facts, a free press isn't just important — it is essential to our survival as a free nation. Someone's got to keep the receipts, and thankfully, it's not your group chat. Thank you to the members of the media present and listening.

We hold this address in the John S. Knight Center, whose staff always looks after elected officials, guests, and the media. Can you please join me in thanking the Knight Center for their hospitality and service? I would also like to thank our interpreters here from Greenleaf and an additional thank you to the staff of ReWorks for making this a zero-waste event for the 8th year.

As you entered the hall, you were greeted by some incredible art. For the fourth year, my team worked with Arts Now to showcase some of our local artists. To Nicole Mullet, her staff, and all of the artists--thank you for the colors you add to our walls, the stories you tell on our stages, the music that lifts our spirits, and the ideas you provoke through your creativity. You help us see the world—not just as it is, but as it *could be*.

As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to the future, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to our dedicated employees of Summit County, our elected officials, our resilient communities, our tireless nonprofit partners, and our businesses that continue to invest in and support our region. Additional, special thanks to a few guests in attendance: Congresswoman

Emilia Sykes, Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne, and our tireless advocates from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio.

The collective commitment, compassion, and collaboration of everyone in this room are the foundation of our strength during both stable and less than certain times. We find ourselves today in a moment of both endurance and preparation. While we face significant headwinds from shifting priorities and dramatic cuts at the state and federal levels, Summit County remains steadfast in its mission: to serve our residents, safeguard our communities, and support our local economy. The challenges before us are not hypothetical, they are real and they are here, now.

As we navigate today's uncharted territory, as always, we are prioritizing the wellbeing of our community and working diligently to plan for what lies ahead. I see my role as County Executive as highly strategic, highly facilitative, and highly relationship driven. Together, with our community's collaborative spirit, we have been fostering partnerships and investing in lasting relationships for years and years, and I am proud of the legacy of collaboration and open dialogue we have built together. Difficult times like these reveal who we really are. Summit County is rising to the moment with resolve, innovation, and unity. We continue to boost our economy, build the community, and empower people.

To that end, there is no better illustration of this than the Polymer Industry Cluster. This initiative is truly a shining example of how we all work together to make incredible things happen. Last year at this event, we reflected on the landmark investments made by the federal and state governments to help establish our Polymer Industry Cluster. As a reminder, we received \$51 million from the Biden administration and were designated the Sustainable Polymer Tech Hub, the only one in the nation. Additionally, we received \$31 million from the DeWine administration and became Ohio's third Innovation Hub. Locally, another \$10 million was contributed as match to the State's grant, including \$1.5 million by the County and the City of Akron.

Folks, this is a monumental accomplishment, and I would like to take a moment to recognize Steve Millard and the team at the Chamber for their leadership in securing these funds and charting a course forward.

Receiving these funds is just the beginning. Over the last year, a collaborative cross-sector team has been working hard to capitalize on those initial investments and are taking the next steps needed to jumpstart our regional polymer sector. In January, the Chamber received a \$3 million federal grant, matched with \$3.4 million dollars locally, to grow the polymer industry's workforce through skills training and job placement, helping young people in Northeast Ohio launch careers in advanced manufacturing.

Recently, the cluster took the significant step of naming Dr. Haaans Dorfi, formerly a key leader at Bridgestone, as the Executive Director and Chief Innovation Officer. We all know the importance of having someone who wakes up every day focusing on the mission at hand. This opportunity requires constant focus and attention. Dr. Dorfi has the experience, drive, and energy to propel the cluster into the future.

Just a few weeks ago, we were excited to announce the location of a new local facility that will be home to researchers, small businesses, and established polymer companies looking to accelerate material production and support to-go-market strategies.

The facility will be located on the campus of the University of Akron, right next to the National Polymer Innovation Center, bringing added synergies to the two locations. This new facility is not just an investment in physical infrastructure. It's an investment in the future of our economy. By redefining our polymer legacy and reaffirming our role as a global leader in polymer innovation, we are drawing talent, attracting new jobs, and ensuring that pioneering research and manufacturing stay rooted right here in Northeast Ohio.

A cornerstone for this innovation is the University of Akron, home to the top-ranked polymer science and plastics engineering program in the world. There would be no Polymer Industry Cluster without the world-class academic programs available at our hometown

University. Please join me in thanking President Nemer and the entire staff of the university for continuing to keep polymers and our region on the map.

At the heart of this initiative—and so many others—is something bigger than any single program or office. It is our strong, connected, vibrant economic development ecosystem. It is an entire network of partners, local governments, nonprofits, schools and universities, private companies, all moving in the same direction. All working toward one goal: to attract, retain, and grow jobs, businesses, and investment. Here is the best part: this ecosystem is alive. It adapts. It anticipates. It responds to the changing needs of our economy and businesses. Whether that means direct services, government capacity, or infrastructure, Summit County is at the table, in the room, and on the ground, wherever we are needed.

Economic development often happens at the street level. It happens when we knock on a door, we shake a hand, and we start a conversation. That's why this year we launched something new: the Business Walk. Our first was in Munroe Falls, where our team and the City's Development Director visited eight small local businesses. Some businesses said, "We're ready to grow, we need more space." Others said, "We're struggling to find workers with the right skills." And, many did not know about the resources available to them and how we can assist. Our job is to meet them where they are, connect them with the right tools, and help them to move forward.

We take the same approach with our Business Retention and Expansion program, known as BRE. This program focuses on and builds relationships with primarily medium- and large-sized businesses. We are engaging companies, so they know we are here, we are listening, and we are ready to assist.

Over the last year, our BRE team connected with businesses in all 31 communities across this County. We made calls and referrals, and we learned a lot. Among the most common referrals made were access to capital, and financing, as well as upskilling opportunities. Finding the right land or building is a critical component to growth and

expansion. Our team works side by side with local partners and, for large site requests, JobsOhio, to respond to detailed requests.

When a company says, “We need a site with this much utility capacity and this many square feet and land,” we don’t waste time. We pull together the data, we package it, and we send it back quickly. That’s how Summit County stays competitive. So far in 2025, we have assisted with 56 site searches.

The second pillar of this economic development ecosystem is institutional capacity. In other words: can local government do its job? And, do it well and timely?

One of the best examples is our Building Standards Division. Safe, secure buildings don’t just happen by accident. They happen because inspections are done right. Because plan reviews are thorough. Permits are issued on time.

Here in Summit County, we’ve gone further. We are business-friendly. In the past year, we eliminated contractor registration fees. We moved nearly everything online—permits, scheduling, and plan reviews. We even offer virtual inspections over video call. After all, it is 2025.

Last year, Building Standards issued permits for more than three and a half billion dollars in construction projects. And on top of that, here’s another number that should make us all proud: our commercial plan review turnaround time is three times faster than the state average. Three. Times. Faster! That’s why companies choose to build here. So, let’s give a big round of applause to our Building Standards team for setting the standard for the state.

Now, let’s talk about putting people to work. Because no matter how good our infrastructure is, no matter how many incentives we offer, no business succeeds without the right talent. That’s where our OhioMeansJobs Center comes in. It’s Summit County’s one-stop workforce hub. Its services are provided free of charge for employers and employees.

Job seekers come to build résumés, practice interviews, and connect with employers. Businesses come to post jobs, find candidates, and train their workforce. One of our most impactful tools is the On-The-Job Training program. Here is how it works: if a business is part of this program, we can reimburse a portion of the training costs. The business reduces its risk and costs, the worker gains a permanent position, and our local economy grows stronger. It is a win-win. In the past year, our On-the-Job Training program has provided over \$500,000 in incentives for employers representing polymers, tech, plumbing and other industries. Employees placed in these jobs were earning an average starting wage of \$21 an hour.

I want to stop for a moment to identify a theme you will hear throughout this speech. That theme is a concern about the loss or potential loss of federal and state funding for essential programming like this. The On the Job Training incentive program is just one of many programs we use to empower our residents that is now threatened due to lack of funding. You'll soon hear about others.

Another piece of our economic development ecosystem is infrastructure, a backbone of economic growth. While it may not be glamorous, one of the most important physical assets we manage is our sanitary sewer system. Sewers are essential. They keep our communities safe, our water clean, and our economy and businesses growing.

This past year, our Sewer District has been hard at work. In New Franklin, we're extending sewer service along State Route 93—an area ripe for thoughtful development. Let me take a moment here to say thank you to outgoing Mayor Adamson. Your partnership with our County team will be deeply missed, and we look forward to continuing to support New Franklin as they grow into their next phase of development.

In Copley, we completed one phase of a major sewer project on State Route 162, with phase two already on the way. We are partnering with Boston Township to bring service to Akron-Cleveland Road. We addressed failing septic systems in Boston Heights. We've supported growth for Hudson's vibrant downtown. And in Peninsula, we are finally, finally moving

toward a decades-long goal of sewer service. That project is critical not only for development but for protecting the Cuyahoga River and our National Park.

These projects may not grab headlines, but they are a foundational piece of growth. And I want to recognize our sewer team, the unsung heroes making this work happen. Please be kind to them when you see them on your street.

Our County Engineer is also often working in the same areas where we are bringing sewers to improve roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure. Thank you, Engineer Brubaker, for your commitment to supporting economic development throughout our County.

When we talk about an “economic development ecosystem,” what does that really mean? It means no one does this alone. It means progress happens when we work together.

We are fortunate to have many incredible partners: our 31 communities, the Greater Akron Chamber, Elevate Greater Akron, ConxusNEO, the Development Finance Authority, Team NEO, GAR, OhioMeansJobs, the Akron Urban League, Stark State, and so many more. When we work together, we can make big, innovative things happen.

Right around the corner, at the PNC building, you will find a perfect example. The PNC building is the second tallest building in Akron and sits at the heart of downtown. The building faced an uncertain future with delinquent taxes, a default on a debt obligation and declining occupancy.

Through a strategic partnership with the Development Finance Authority, Land Bank and City, we were able to acquire the property, stabilize it and resolve overdue tax obligations. No taxpayer dollars were spent on this and we ensured that all taxing authorities, including Akron Public Schools, received their full distributions. Innovative approaches like this safeguard the vitality of downtown Akron. Thank you, Fiscal Officer Kristen Scalise, for helping to make this a reality.

And, speaking of Akron, it has once again been named an All-American City! Hats off to Mayor Malik and his team, who impressed me and folks from all over the country while in Denver, shouting from coast to coast about the economic opportunities that exist in our region. I was so thrilled to join the mayor and many others for this exciting event. Congratulations!

The outcome of all this economic development work is a more resilient, more responsive, and a more competitive local economy. Together, we are making Summit County a place where businesses want to invest, where people want to work, and where families want to live. Together—we are proving that when an entire community rows in the same direction, there is no limit to how far we can go.

You cannot talk about economic development and workforce and not talk about housing. No matter where you are in this County, or who you speak with, affordable housing tops the list of concerns for every community. Like counties throughout the nation, Summit has seen rising housing costs and limited options, exacerbating an already tight housing ecosystem.

Our Department of Community Development helps residents access critical housing assistance, most of it funded by federal and state grants and administered locally. Through HUD's CDBG and HOME programs, as well as state programs like Lead Safe Ohio, we can remove lead hazards to protect children, repair roofs, furnaces, windows, and hot water tanks and, add insulation, ADA modifications, and other safety updates

Since last year, we have improved over 240 homes. This year, we also secured a new HUD grant to modify homes for older adults, adding features like stair rails, grab bars, and ADA toilets so they can age safely and independently. These small changes have a big impact—helping families through hardship and allowing older adults to live with dignity in their own homes. Currently, 188 families are in the process of receiving services through our programs. Beyond the individual level, we are improving Summit County's housing stock, house by house and home by home. But let me be clear: federal funding for all these programs is at risk.

Earlier this year, Summit County partnered with the Land Bank to launch the Housing Research Collaborative, aimed at understanding the challenges residents face in securing or keeping housing—and identifying community-driven solutions. Guided by a Steering Committee of professionals, we held listening sessions this Spring, with more than 200 participants. Conversations covered evictions, foreclosures, specialized housing needs, public safety, policy, and more.

Thank you to the Steering Committee for their guidance, and to all the organizations and individuals who shared their experiences and ideas. Together, this process generated over 300 recommendations, with 120 receiving strong support. A strategic work session then narrowed these to nine priorities viewed as feasible, impactful, and sustainable—such as creating a zoning work group, expanding home repair funding, and strengthening financial education for young adults.

From this work, three themes emerged:

- Improve education and communication
- Build cross-sector partnerships
- Establish dedicated housing leadership

In short, this means breaking down barriers, aligning goals across the county, and committing to implement solutions that meet our community's housing needs. All findings are available in the final report at the link on the screen.

Today, I am committing to convening collaborative efforts to integrate themes and recommendations that will assist in moving the needle on housing. Many of you know the saying, “if it’s not someone’s job, it’s not getting done.” Facilitating collaborative efforts in housing will now be the primary focus for one of my staff members who has significant housing experience and community engagement.

While my office will provide leadership, I am asking for partners to join me. As we so often do with other efforts, the County stands ready to convene all those partners including those in the private sector, who have a stake in this work.

In true Summit County fashion, we are once again partnering with a nationally recognized organization to coordinate a comprehensive and balanced local approach to housing. Just last week, Summit County was accepted into a working group convened by New York University to develop housing solutions. The Executive's Office will be joined by staff from the Cities of Akron and Cuyahoga Falls, the Continuum of Care, the Realtors Association, and the Land Bank to use what we learned in our recent listening tour and translate that into meaningful actions.

As we are working through this process, we will be calling on all of you to lean in, when we do, please say yes. Living in a safe and affordable place is critical to building a thriving community.

Equally important are resources that enable residents to live full and healthy lives. As I stand here today, we are headed into unprecedented headwinds. The changes at the federal and state level will have major impacts on many of our major programs, and among the most concerning are Medicaid and SNAP, which is food assistance.

The anticipated cuts coming to these programs will make it more difficult for individuals and families to apply for or maintain eligibility for health insurance and food assistance.

While we cannot control those changes locally, we can control our efforts to help navigate these complex processes.

In the past, we launched a community outreach initiative to locate case managers at fourteen local library branches to answer questions and assist residents throughout the county. This effort has proven successful. We know it will be even more valuable once the new requirements are in place.

There is great concern about the new requirements and cost sharing coming to these programs and we are working to develop additional outreach efforts to assist our community. Summit County must be prepared to do even more to help ensure our residents have food on the table and access to healthcare.

Please, keep in mind, many of these residents are working. Sometimes, they are working two and three jobs to survive. Yet, they struggle—they are enrolled in these programs because their employer may not offer health benefits, and the rising cost of groceries necessitates the need for supplemental aid.

Looking to a future where these programs are even more difficult to access, the ripple effect of cuts to Medicaid will be felt across the community. Hospitals and healthcare providers will face significant challenges, and critical substance use, and mental health services will be out of reach for many. The public sector, non-profits, philanthropy and the business community must work together to support individuals at risk of losing benefits under these new policies. As a community, we need to ensure that people have clear, accessible pathways to meet new federal and state work and education requirements. It's also essential to recognize that many so-called “able-bodied” individuals may face barriers to employment—barriers that have nothing to do with motivation. Consider, for example, someone caring for a sick parent, child, or spouse. These caregivers face serious obstacles that could now jeopardize their access to Medicaid.

I believe challenges bring opportunity. The opportunity to think in new ways, to engage with new and different partners, and to revisit the usual way of doing things. Folks, things will get harder. But we have faced challenges before---the Great Recession, the opioid epidemic, the pandemic—and yet, here we stand together, stronger than ever. I know this is true because I see this work being done day in and day out. For example, JFS has seen strong results from our specialized programming for youth and those encountering the benefits cliff.

Since the beginning of this fiscal year, our BOSS program, a workforce development initiative offered year-round for teens and young adults, has served more participants than in any other

year since launching. Nearly 1,000 participants have earned credentials and were compensated \$1.5 million for paid work experience. These young people are now better prepared to enter the workforce and, most importantly, succeed in their chosen field.

This summer, 258 teens participated in JFS's 8-week, Summer Youth Employment program. Collectively, they earned over \$600,000 and put that money right back into stimulating our local economy.

An incredible fifty-nine percent of youth from Akron Public Schools had work experiences aligned with their specific career pathways, helping to build both skills and confidence in their future. Programs like this show us our young people are eager to work, learn and grow, when given the opportunity.

I am proud of the JFS team's innovative use of our closed-loop referral system, the Unite Us platform. Last year, I shared how our NEXT program was using Unite Us to streamline workflows and outcomes for both providers and clients. The program continues to succeed, and we've since expanded Unite Us across other areas of JFS. Now, we're using Unite Us to connect clients with non-JFS services, like housing and food. For example, instead of directing clients to call 2-1-1 or other agencies on their own, case managers can ask if the Unite Us Care Coordination team can reach out to help. Unite Us then contacts the client, explores available resources, and makes referrals ensuring their needs are fully addressed. This work is truly changing how we support our clients and paving the way for more positive outcomes.

Looking from a more global perspective, Unite Us continues to be an incredible tool for many organizations impacting residents throughout the county. As of August, there are nearly 300 organizations active on the network, and they have connected over 4,000 residents to services. Of note, the most common services requested in recent months were employment, food, and housing. This insight tells us there is more work to be done.

I am excited to announce all four of our major hospital systems— Akron Children’s Hospital, Cleveland Clinic Akron General, Summa Health, and Western Reserve Hospital—are all on the Unite Us platform. Further, our local medical college, NEOMED, has also integrated into the platform, meaning our future healthcare providers are already learning about its role and importance of the social determinants of health in delivering care and services.

What this means is that residents are better served and connected to the care they need when they need it, inside and outside of the hospital. This is a significant achievement, and I am grateful for the collaboration that went into bringing our community and especially our hospital partners on board. Thank you to all our partners for your commitment. Please contact my team if you are not yet using this game changing tool in your organization. As a reminder, this platform is available to any community-based organization in Summit County at no cost.

Our landmark opioid lawsuit has provided the funds to make investments into two major strategic initiatives, including this \$5.5 million dollar investment in Unite Us. Last year, at the State of the County, I talked to you about our other strategic priority—establishing a supporting organization that would support and impact the Summit County community for generations to come.

Now, contrary to popular belief, spending a large sum of money in the most effective way and the due diligence required takes time. In the last year, we made great progress in establishing a structure to make the supporting organization a reality. Some of our timeline is dependent on federal government approval, but we are optimistic that the “Summit Health and Safety Innovation Fund” will be solidified in 2026.

This 45 million dollar landmark collaboration would not have been possible without the leadership at Akron Community Foundation from John Petures and John Garofolo. It is appropriate to note that the focus of this supporting organization is innovation. What we’ve done together in this effort is nothing short of revolutionary.

And, as the torch is passed from John to John, John Petures—let me say thank you, my friend. Thank you for your service to our community. What we have done with the supporting organization will help families and agencies well beyond our time and will serve as a legacy of the love we both share for Summit County and its people.

And John Garofolo—thank you for continuing to lead this important organization and recognizing that philanthropic partnership with government and the business community is what truly sets Summit County apart.

To that end, I'm also proud to announce an additional \$500,000 grant that will be allocated to ACF for the Opioid Healing Fund. This fund supports grants of up to \$25,000 to small, non-profit organizations and their local efforts to support and serve residents searching for addiction and mental health services. This brings the total amount invested in this specific fund and reinvested into our community to \$1.7 million. This partnership puts grant dollars into operations for grass roots organizations and those front-line providers who truly meet people where they are. In total, the Opiate Abatement Advisory Council has directed over \$16 million of settlement funds back into our communities to address substance use, mental health, and public safety.

Mental health and substance use resources are on the ballot this fall. Access to treatment is vital—please consider supporting Issue 1 and the Summit County ADM Board.

I hope that it is clear to all of you that in Summit County, we measure our progress not only by the work we do and services we provide, but the lives we touch. This year, with much collaboration, we took a significant step forward with the launch of our Trauma-Informed Care initiative. This initiative is a countywide commitment to understanding the lasting effects of trauma and responding with empathy, compassion, and practical support.

At its heart, this initiative asks a different question. Instead of “What’s wrong with you,”

it asks, “What happened to you?” This simple shift in perspective changes everything. It opens the door to dignity, trust, and healing—all essential to building an even stronger and resilient Summit County.

Our county understands that trauma affects more than the individual. Its waves are felt in our families, our schools, our workplaces, and our neighborhoods. The ripples are visible in all areas from public safety to economic development to housing to our schools. By implementing trauma informed care approaches in areas, we can build a more compassionate and safe community. This initiative is not just about new programming; it is about our people. Caring for the heart of our community reinforces the foundation of our county. That is the future that we are committed to building—together.

Boosting the economy and building community leads to empowering people. Often, that requires some assistance with a fresh start. Prosecutor Elliot Kolkovich and Clerk of Courts Tavia Galonski hosted a One-Stop Expungement Day at the end of last year. In just four hours, over 165 people were able to have their felony convictions reviewed, sealed, and expunged if they met certain criteria. This opens up their opportunities for jobs and housing. In fact, they are hosting another One-Stop Expungement Day next week on Friday, October 10 at the Summit County Courthouse. Thank you both for going the extra mile to help improve people’s lives.

Because even just walking into a government building can be intimidating, before you even get to the paperwork. Sometimes all you need is a bit of help walking through the process to begin to change your life. I am so proud of the public servants who do this work every day.

Nearly every public servant has embraced a changing technological landscape in their field. Enhancements in technology are a key focus of our work. At the core of these efforts is “Summit Connects”, which is our public safety fiber network. At this time last year, we were preparing to begin construction and start putting fiber optic cable in the ground.

To date, we have completed more than 50 miles of the ring and are actively working in several communities. Like any infrastructure project, this work takes time. We continue to “inch” forward and expect the fiber ring to be completed by next spring. As construction continues, we’re working with all 31 communities on what comes next. Once finished, the “Summit Connects” fiber ring will link every community to a secure public safety network and serve as the backbone for future services like data sharing, smart utilities, and more. The connectivity provided by this project is both foundational and illustrative of how Summit County consolidates services to best serve residents.

This technology is actively on display at our Summit Emergency Communications Center. High quality 9-1-1 dispatch services to the majority of Summit County residents flow through this facility at the rate of 840 calls a day. This state-of-the-art center serves, Boston Heights, Copley, Coventry, Cuyahoga Falls, Fairlawn, Mogadore, Munroe Falls, Silver Lake, Stow, Tallmadge, the Sheriff’s Office, Summit Metro Parks, and Akron co-locates at our facility.

Last year, we were pleased to announce the launch of text to 9-1-1, and translation services, a critical capability, now helping us better serve those in need of emergency services. Summit County is the first in Ohio to use AI for calls placed to non-emergency lines. Currently, our dispatch center fields nearly 250,000 non-emergency calls each year. Questions about trash pickup, fireworks, or power outages can pull dispatchers away from a true emergency. The AI system quickly handles routine calls, while immediately transferring emergencies to live dispatchers, improving their response times.

This assistive tool isn’t a replacement but a safeguard, and early results show measurable improvements as we continue investing in smarter public safety. Rest assured, if you dial 9-1-1, you will speak to a dispatcher.

We are taking the same approach to improving our County Jail. In June, Sheriff Fatheree and I announced nearly \$3 million dollars in state funding to modernize the jail’s Intake and Booking areas. The project will expand medical and mental health care, substance use

treatment, and suicide prevention, improving safety for deputies and inmates and supporting recovery as individuals reenter the community.

We appreciate the State's recognition of the significant costs involved in maintaining aging infrastructure, and for its partnership in our modernization efforts. We expect construction to begin early next year and hope to see the project completed in summer 2026. It is safe to say that the collaboration between my office and the Sheriff's team is literally paying off and paving the way for a safer, more functional jail. Thank you, Sheriff Fatheree.

As we invest significant taxpayer dollars into projects like this, it is important that our finances continue to be an open book to the community. In 2023, our Finance and Budget Department launched Open Finance—an interactive website portal showing all of the county's financial information. It is updated weekly and provides a transparent view of revenue received and money spent. We are proud of our finances here in Summit County. With the lowest sales tax rate in the state, we have always done more with less.

This year, we completed a major capital project, made possible through our ongoing responsible and strategic fiscal management. In July, the Summit County Board of Elections officially relocated to a new, state-of-the-art space at 1050 East Tallmadge Ave. In-person Early Voting has increased tremendously since 2020. Our new location boasts forty thousand square feet, more parking, and consolidates the administration and the Early Vote Center.

We are saving money by stream-lining all elections services into one building. We are also expanding accessibility, adding more space for clearer signage and parking spaces for voters with disabilities. This \$15 million investment enables us to continue operating safe, secure, and more efficient elections.

This new building is owned by the Summit County Land Bank, who also served as the project manager for this intensive construction project. I want to thank Executive Director Patrick Bravo and his team for their stewardship on this project. It was completed on time and with no cost overruns. I know the staff, taxpayers, and voters of Summit County will benefit

greatly from all your hard work. Thank you, Patrick. I also want to thank County Council members for recognizing this need in our community and responding with this significant investment.

Summit County clearly understands that safe and secure elections start with local government.

Adjacent to the Board of Elections are other county and state offices, including the Jobs Center and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. That means you can now get a free State ID and walk right over to the Board of Elections, all without leaving the parking lot. Early voting begins next Tuesday, October 7th. So, make sure you tell everyone you know that early voting is only available at 1050 East Tallmadge Ave.

Summit County continues to provide exemplary service on a tight budget, operating, like I said, with the lowest sales tax rate in the state and a small portion of your property tax bill. Concerns about rising property taxes are dominating conversations all over the state. Property owners are feeling overwhelmed by inflation and the higher cost of living. They also expect critical property tax-funded services to be available when they need them, especially public safety services.

With the State legislature considering dangerous and potentially devastating options like the elimination of certain property taxes impacting communities, levy agencies, and schools, and, the elimination of all property taxes sought via a citizen-led constitutional amendment, it became clear that Summit County could not stand on the sidelines. In response to these concerns, we are seeking to become the first charter county to have the ability to replace traditional inside millage with charter millage and to impose a cap on the growth of this millage.

As we so often do in Summit County, we have identified a proactive measure to better suit the needs of our residents. This is “responsible tax reform” that limits new growth while also

funding high-quality public safety services. Most importantly, it protects property owners from sudden tax increases in this portion of their tax bill due to sharp valuation increases.

Please keep in mind the limitation and switch to charter millage, along with the growth cap, will only ever apply to the county government's 2.2 mills. This is a small portion of most property owner's bills; however, it is the portion we can directly control and impacts our ability to continue to provide necessary services.

We are working hard to get the word out about Issue 2 which will be on your November 4 ballot. There is a card on your table with more information. I hope we earn your support over the next month. No matter what decision you make, please remember to vote on or before November 4th. Thank you to my colleagues on Council for your bipartisan support for this effort.

In closing, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all of you—our dedicated public servants, hardworking staff, passionate community members, and tireless business and nonprofit leaders. Your commitment, your resilience, and your belief in something bigger than yourselves holds our communities together. We don't pretend that the road ahead will be easy. The climate that we are living in and the challenges we are facing: economic, social, political, and environmental—are real, and at times, can be overwhelming. With state and federal funding constantly on the chopping block—particularly the resources that support communities—new obstacles emerge every day.

But, if the past has taught us anything, it is that progress doesn't come from perfection; it comes from persistence. Progress comes from people like you, who show up every day with a willingness to listen, to serve, to lead, to learn and to face headwinds, both those that are real today and those that will come, with vision and determination.

We must, each of us, challenge ourselves to prepare for and navigate through all that is headed our way.

There is a lot of skepticism out there about government. But, here in Summit County, we don't just talk—we act. Every action we take is in service of the people who live and work here. The State of Summit County is strong because its people are strong. I have been known to say—no one is coming to save us. We must control our own destiny to the best of our ability. Let's keep moving forward, navigating these head winds together. Let's keep striving for a future that reflects the best of who we are, and the best of what we can become.

Thank you for all you do.