

State of the City

Mayor Mark Mallory

March 16, 2006

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Good Evening.

Thank you, Darrell, for that wonderful introduction. Darrell is an excellent example of the type of young person who we need as the next generation of leaders in Cincinnati.

Thanks also to Ellen van der Horst, the newest addition to the leadership of the business community as the head of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber.

I want to extend my thanks to the leadership of the Faith community, Reverend Jeannine Walker, Ms. Karen Dabdoub, Rabbi Kopnick, and Father Knapp. You have given our city the warmest of prayers and best of wishes.

Thank you also to the Freedom Center for providing such an incredible venue for us this evening. The staff and management have been absolutely wonderful to us. The Freedom Center is fantastic. If you have not been here before, you need to make it a point to come visit, and bring you family and friends, and their friends, and so on. This is one of Cincinnati's newest assets and it is important that we support it.

And, I especially want to thank my parents for being here with me here tonight. Ladies and gentleman, my mother and my father, William L. Mallory, Sr., former Majority Floor Leader of the Ohio House of Representatives. I never get tired of saying that you two are my heroes. Your love and support inspires me in all that I do.

Thanks also to City Manager David Rager, Cincinnati Police Chief Tom Streicher, Cincinnati Fire Chief Robert Wright, Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Rosa Blackwell for being here tonight.

We are also joined by Hamilton County Commissioners and mayors from our neighboring cities throughout Hamilton County, as well as Mayor Tom Guidugli of Newport, Mayor Thomas Rankle of Dayton, Kentucky, and former Cincinnati City Mayors.

And, I have to thank my team, the nine dedicated members of city council. Their professionalism, hard work, and passion have already had a significant impact on our city.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank the people of Cincinnati for putting their faith and trust in me to lead our great city.

It has been a little over 100 days since I took the oath of office, and I come before you tonight to report on the state of Cincinnati. This evening I am going to talk about what we have

accomplished since the last State of the City Address. I am also going to tell you what we have achieved since I took office, and what we plan to accomplish throughout the next year.

For more than a decade, as a State Senator and State Representative, I served the City of Cincinnati in a different leadership capacity. But, today, I stand before you as Mayor and from this position I can tell you without a doubt that there is a high level of hope, and a strong sense of enthusiasm in what we can achieve in Cincinnati. It is a new day in our city. The state of Cincinnati is strong and its future is promising.

Financially, the City of Cincinnati performed better than expected, both in terms of revenues and expenditures. The result is seen in the General Fund balance for last year. We ended with a carryover totaling more than \$7.7 million more than expected. We maintained our excellent bond ratings with both Standard and Poor's and Moody's.

The Health Department implemented a new billing system that saved the city \$300,000 since October of last year. This new billing system is projected to save the city more than \$1,000,000 this year.

In 2005, the Real Estate Division sought new tax exemptions for city owned property, saving the city \$500,000. We also sold 25 City owned properties, which generated \$1 million dollars.

Our City's strength is also reflected in the number of awards that we received last year.

Cincinnati's Urban Forestry program is considered a national leader in its field. Willie Carden, Director of Parks, does a phenomenal job, and under his leadership, readers of CityBeat voted to recognize that money spent on Cincinnati Parks was "the Best Use of Public Funds" for the past three consecutive years. And, last year marks the 25th year in a row, that Cincinnati has been awarded the Tree City USA award.

Our Water Works Department received the prestigious Platinum Award for Sustained Competitiveness Achievement from the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies.

In January, the Metropolitan Sewer District was one of only seven utilities in the country to be honored by the National Association of Clean Water Agencies for Excellence in Management. While MSD has received many awards for wastewater treatment excellence, this is the first time its management strategies have received national accolades.

The Real Estate Ambassador Program was given the "Ambassador to American City Award" by the U. S. Conference of Mayors. This program was formed in partnership with the City of Cincinnati, the Board of Realtors and the Home Ownership Center.

These are just a few examples of awards that demonstrate the strength of our city administration.

In addition to the awards that we have received, two new and significant programs came on line last year in the Department of Community Development and Planning.

The “American Dream Downpayment Initiative” started providing down payment assistance to low and moderate-income homebuyers. Since April of last year, 31 first time home buyers received up to \$8,500 dollars to help cover the down payment and closing costs for their first home.

The second is the “Grow Cincinnati Fund.” This new loan program is designed to give small businesses greater access to capital in order to promote the creation and retention of jobs.

Both these two programs reflect our commitment to increasing homeownership and growing small businesses: two of my administration’s top priorities

But even with this record of success, there still is the belief by many in our community that our city is struggling. In fact, according to a recent poll, over 60% of citizens feel that the city is going in the wrong direction.

It is clear that citizens in this city want change.

When I was elected, I spoke about the enthusiasm and optimism in our community. I spoke about the partnerships we need to create between citizens and City Hall to move our city forward. Building on that foundation of hope, strength and pride, we have taken steps to move our city forward.

Changing the culture at City Hall was my first priority. Citizens should feel that they have access to City government. So, my first act was to unlock the front door to the Mayor’s Office and allow the public access once again. I took the next step of removing the security barriers from the front door of city hall to welcome people back to their city government. I have re-initiated Mayor’s Night In to hear directly from citizens about their concerns and to receive their input about how the city should move forward.

I reached out in another way to increase accessibility for the public, by giving more access to the media. I hold a weekly press briefing to update the media in order to provide the public with more information on our initiatives and our progress.

Working with City Council, we have changed the tone of Council meetings by changing the rules by which we operate. The results are obvious. We have eliminated the rancor and raised the tenor of our debates. These changes allow City Council to focus on what is truly important: Developing real solutions to the problems facing our city.

As an example of this new relationship, we experienced the smoothest budget process in recent memory, and in that budget, we added funding for police neighborhood walking patrols and a new fire recruit class. We also increased funding for the Arts, and enhanced efforts to expand home ownership through the implementation of a one-stop housing shop.

After passing the budget, my next priority was the issue of public safety. Last year was one of the most violent years Cincinnati has seen in decades. That is why I teamed up with the Chief of

Police, the Superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools, the Coroner, and other law enforcement agencies to work together on a comprehensive Public Safety initiative.

The plan merged the Vice and Drug enforcement units in order to target mid-level drug dealers. With this new strategy, we plan to more aggressively utilize Ohio's property forfeiture laws to seize assets of those drug dealers.

And because of the trends that we have seen in juvenile crime, we began a series of truancy sweeps to send a message to children about the importance of education. Since the sweeps began, more than 100 students were taken off the streets and put back in the classroom.

Perhaps the most important thing we did was to call on the community to partner with the police department and the media to help us solve crimes. Here is the good news, they have responded.

Calls to crime stoppers have been unprecedented since we announced this initiative. And awards given for information are up dramatically. My office even received an anonymous donation of \$10,000 dollars to Crime Stoppers by a citizen who does not live in the city, but who wants to see the situation improve.

We also partnered Dr. John Eck and his students at the University of Cincinnati Criminology Department, looking for innovative ways to find solutions in the area of public safety.

We also asked for the media's help in targeting the 50 most wanted criminals in our area, and they too have responded. Channel 12 developed a Wheel of Justice. They put the pictures of 12 fugitives on a wheel. They spin the wheel every Wednesday morning and they highlight the targeted fugitive during their newscasts.

I took the first spin on the wheel and they caught that guy in 2 hours. The next week, Chief Streicher took a spin on the wheel and they caught that guy too. Then the acting police chief of Lincoln Heights took a spin and they caught that guy. The following week, the sheriff of Kenton County in Kentucky took a spin and not only did they catch that guy; they caught the two guys on either side of him, as well. In total, the 6 spins have led to 8 arrests.

Now, students at Newport Middle School have got in the act. They collected five hundred dollars to sponsor the reward for a bad guy. They'll be on Channel 12 next week to spin the wheel.

The crime problem in our community did not develop over night, and we won't solve it overnight. But the examples that I have just given you demonstrate the power of partnerships between the police, the community, and the media.

I have also focused on creating regional partnerships. Cincinnati cannot operate in isolation. We must reach across borders and work with our neighbors to move the entire region forward. Major issues like transportation, economic development and crime have regional implications. That is why I am building relationships with mayors on both sides of the river and working to strengthen the relationship between the City and the County.

We have also been working to create a more positive view of Cincinnati at the national level. I have reconnected Cincinnati with national organizations including, the US Conference of Mayors, the National League of Cities, and CEO's for Cities. Membership in these organizations is valuable because it allows us to network with other city leaders and learn about what works in urban centers.

I always say that vibrant neighborhoods are one of the City of Cincinnati's greatest assets. Each one has a unique and dynamic personality that adds to the fabric of our culture. That's why I have convened the first ever meetings between the Mayor and Community Council Presidents. I am going to keep meeting with community Council Presidents on a quarterly basis in order to give them direct access to the Mayor.

Now, I have just told about the progress that we have made. And you know that we still much to do to turn Cincinnati into the great city we know it can be.

I feel a sense of anticipation in all corners of the city. Everywhere I go I sense the hope and possibility that Cincinnati is ready to move to the next level.

So, Let me share with you a few things that we plan to accomplish this year:

I will continue to work with the county to ensure that the city is a full partner in the development of the Banks project and that the project becomes a success. Two of my top priorities for the Banks are minority inclusion and workforce development. I am convinced that by working with the Commissioners that these important priorities will be included in the final Banks Deal.

In just the next few weeks, we will put forward a series of new initiatives. We will launch the City Green Initiative; a program coordinated by the Cincinnati Parks Department designed to enhance City services through green technologies. The Green Initiative will use creative strategies and innovative technologies such as solar and wind energy, community gateways, and environmental education. We will hold a series of Town Hall Meetings focusing on health care, jobs and education in Cincinnati. We will be partnering with the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, Cincinnati Public Schools and the Children's Hunger Alliance to expand the summer food program to add more locations and sponsors to feed more children. We are doing this because many of the children, who are eligible for the free lunch program during the school year, do not eat during the day in the summer months because they are not in school.

In the coming year, we can look forward to seeing the opening of Cincinnati's newest park and recreation site, and the reconstruction of its oldest park. The new Otto Armeleder Memorial Park and Recreation Site on the Little Miami River in Linwood will feature hiking trails, meadows, soccer fields and a dog park. Mt. Auburn's Hopkins Park, established in 1866, will undergo a complete overhaul.

In June, we will be celebrating the grand re-opening of the expanded Cinergy Convention Center and I encourage everyone to come and join in the celebration. This major renovation and

expansion has been completed on time and under-budget. The expanded center will allow Cincinnati to attract larger conventions to the city.

There are two other major public revitalization projects that will be completed this year that will bring new energy to downtown. In Late Summer, the Government Square renovation will be complete, improving public access to downtown dramatically. Then, this fall, we will complete the renovation of our city's most recognizable landmark: Fountain Square.

In the coming year, the COP-SMART program will come on-line. The program will install new advanced computers in police cruisers that will allow officers to access more information than ever before. This will improve efficiency and free up more time for officers to focus on Community Oriented Policing.

We will soon begin an electrical energy savings program for traffic signals that will reduce city energy usage and save over \$250,000 dollars in the first ten-years.

Cincinnati's youth are an underutilized resource. That's why I will be focusing on increasing opportunities for young people to become more involved in the city of Cincinnati. I will be creating a Mayor's Youth Council to seek input from young people throughout the community on how to make their lives better. In addition, I will be encouraging City employees to volunteer their time and serve as mentors to young people. Mentoring programs have been proven to be a way of positively influencing the lives of young people, and city employees have a lot to offer young people.

Speaking of city employees, I would like to take a minute to share with you a quick story about the quality of their character. On my 100th day, I sent an e-mail to city employees thanking them for their work in helping to get the city moving in the right direction. Once I sent the email, my email box began to immediately fill up with responses from city employees who were thanking me for showing an appreciation for their work. In case I have not said this enough, I want all City employees to know how much I appreciate their work. There is no way that we can do what needs to be done in the city without the help of each of them. So once again, thank you for your hard work.

By the end of the spring, we will put together the first annual Mayor's Summer Job Fair to connect young people with resources, a work ethic, and a sense of accomplishment. In addition, I intend to create a Young Professional Kitchen Cabinet to gain perspective on how to attract and retain young professionals in the Cincinnati area and to develop stronger ties between the city and the young professional community.

Creating a city of the future means providing services that stabilize, strengthen, and empower our neighborhoods to be the best they can be. Each neighborhood should be safe, clean, and economically viable.

I will be developing a program that focuses city services on individual neighborhoods in a concentrated period of time so that we can see an immediate noticeable impact on the quality of

life in the neighborhood. Based on the Indianapolis model, “City Hall for a Day,” residents will be able to get direct assistance and information to help address community concerns.

The City will continue our fight to reduce the amount of vacant buildings. Just yesterday, as a result of the hard work of members of Council, we put into place an aggressive new strategy for dealing with vacant and abandoned buildings. Those types of buildings lead to criminal activity and countless calls to the police, resulting in millions of dollars in property damage due to arson, and reduced property value of the surrounding housing stock. Cincinnati has approximately 1,700 vacated buildings. By working with the property owners to bringing these buildings back on line will help provide a stronger base for our communities and increase public safety in our neighborhoods.

We will add to our efforts to increase public safety by partnering with the Cincinnati Bar Foundation, and the University Hospital Trauma Center to develop a program called “Out of the Crossfire.” The program will deal with gun violence by directing services to gunshot victims. Often the victims of gun violence will seek revenge against their attackers instead of giving information to the police. The program aims to break that cycle by providing hospital based counseling services that address all aspects of the gunshot wound victim’s recovery. Programs like these in other cities have been shown to reduce retaliation and improve the lives of the victims.

I will also be focused on improving conditions for economic development in our city.

I will create a Small Business Advisory Council to identify and discuss solutions that will help small businesses in the city.

We are continuing to work on the reinstatement of the Office of Environmental Management and the Planning Department. Both of which will be included in my budget priorities.

I also think that it is critical that we change the national image of Cincinnati. That’s why I am with groups like the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, Sister Cities network, area Chambers of Commerce, and the Regional Tourism Network to help promote all of the great things about Cincinnati.

The possibilities for our future are limitless. But the promise begins with every one of us rekindling our passion for Cincinnati.

Cincinnati is a great city that is on its way back to being one of the greatest cities in America. We have a lot of work before us but I am confident in our ability to succeed. I cannot do that alone; City Hall cannot do it alone. We need the commitment from all citizens across this city. We have a great story in Cincinnati and it is time to start telling that story again, not just to the outside world, but also to ourselves.

We have a collective responsibility to the greatness of Cincinnati, which includes embracing challenges and working to create a new civic-minded cultural fabric. This is the challenge I put before you tonight. Together, we can be a part of bringing our city into a new era. We can have

clean streets, safe neighborhoods, a first-class riverfront, an even greater Arts community, and a strong business climate. We can achieve all of it by creating partnerships that bring people, resources and ideals together. I am committed to doing my part and as Mayor I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for joining me tonight and may God continue to bless the great city of Cincinnati.