

**Mayor Brian C. Hartwell  
State of the City Address  
Madison Heights, Michigan  
March 1, 2019**

**Greeting & Introduction**

Good morning. Thanks for joining us at the State of the City Address for Madison Heights, as we celebrate 2018 and prepare for 2019. I want to thank the other elected officials here, especially my colleague Mayor Webb who will speak next. Thanks to Congressman Andy Levin and County Treasurer Andy Meisner for their words reminding us that politics is about turning ideas into action.

I am proud to say that thanks to the commitment of the people who serve the City of Madison Heights, the State of our City is strong.

The strength of Madison Heights is a result of the hard work of our City Council, administration, and dedicated employees. Please join me in collectively recognizing Councilmembers Bliss, Scott, Corbett, Gettings, Soltis, and Grafstein. Please stand to be recognized. Important factors for why Madison Heights is a well-managed city are the leaders of our departments. I have the privilege of introducing them: DPS Director Joseph Vitali, Jr., Chief of Police Corey Haines, Fire Chief Greg Lelito and Fire Marshal Paul Biliti, Library Director Roslyn Yerman, Clerk Cheryl Printz, HR Director Amy Mischak, Economic Supervisor Linda Williams, and City Attorneys Larry & Jeff Sherman. Joining our city this month is the new finance director and treasurer Linda Kunath.

Last but not least, is the new City Manager for Madison Heights, Melissa Marsh. Melissa was hired by City Council after a nationwide search, actually, an international search. Melissa is no stranger to Madison Heights. She has served our residents for 13 years. When we asked her to step up, she rose to the challenge. Melissa immediately put in motion transformational change. For the first time in years, morale at city hall is off the charts, thanks to Melissa's cooperative approach with our 150 full time and 150 part time employees. Melissa interacts with the public

with such grace, confidence, and sincerity unseen in other city managers, that I believe city hall has become a more welcoming, accessible institution. Also important, Melissa designed a new Strategic Planning process, a “Blueprint for our Future” that allows us to make fiscally smart decisions. Over the next three to five years, you will see this strategic plan come to life with a focus on 5 areas:

1. Economic Development,
2. Public Safety,
3. Quality of Life,
4. Infrastructure, and
5. Financial Sustainability.

The 5 pillars of progress. Please join me in thanking City Manager Melissa Marsh.

### **Business Update**

Because this is a Chamber of Commerce event, let’s start off with some investment numbers: \$18.5 million. That’s the amount that 144 companies invested in Madison Heights, setting an annual record in business activity.

Let’s break down what that \$18.5 million in total investment means:

- It means 1,800 new or retained jobs in Madison Heights.
- It strengthens and expands our larger international and American companies including major projects at Tygrus, Brasco International, Design Fabrication, and AMS Steel.
- It means that the entrepreneurial spirit in Madison Heights is alive with an all-time record of small business start-ups including the new salon called Amore Beautiful You in our Downtown District and four nutrition businesses opening in the last quarter.

### **Industrial Sector**

I want to share with you a few examples of the companies responsible for helping Madison Heights achieve such a great year.

In our industrial sector, home to 300 manufacturing businesses, three large companies relocated their headquarters from another city to Madison Heights. Shelving Inc.'s headquarters was in Auburn Hills a year ago. After company leaders surveyed other cities, they chose to move their headquarters to Madison Heights, bringing 40 jobs and investing \$1.8 million dollars to turn this dusty old machine shop into the productive space we see today. Our city's new policy to be development ready was the key to closing this deal.

Another company to move its headquarters to Madison Heights is Vimax Media, a food marketing company that produces branded social media food content. Vimax moved 20 jobs into our city and invested \$240,000 in extensive remodeling of its 9,000 square foot building. Please help me welcome Michael McGraw, owner and president of Vimax Media.

Another company, this one moving its headquarters from Wayne County, is Edward Duffy & Company, a major supplier of mechanical tubing and pipe. The company plans on spending \$4.5 million to build a 34,000 square-foot building on Stephenson Highway. This project will create 20 additional full-time jobs. With us today is Mr. Tom Larsen & and his wife Kristie. Please join me in thanking them for their investment.

We were shocked to read the news of Walmart acquiring Madison Heights based Moosejaw, a leading online outdoor retailer, to compete head-to-head with Amazon. More often than not, big mergers result in relocating or downsizing. Moosejaw, known for its quirky marketing and edgy outdoor gear, could have packed its bags and left town. Instead, Moosejaw doubled down its investment in Madison Heights with a major expansion, investing over \$500,000, and keeping 250 employees employed in Madison Heights.

### **Commercial Sector**

If our industrial and manufacturing industries are seeing growth, it is only natural to see parallel growth in our commercial sector.

The most frequent question that residents and business owners ask me is, "What's replacing the former Kmart?" If you have not heard the big announcement, the Niki Group and Landmark

Commercial Real Estate Services bought the 40 acre Kmart site to bring in a BJ's Wholesale and a new restaurant with outdoor seating. Construction is occurring as we speak with an investment of 9.2 million dollars. If you have never heard of BJ's Wholesale, it is a wholesale club similar to Costco. There are over 200 BJ's in 16 states, and we will get the first one in Michigan! Corporate executives from Boston credited our city's efficient licensing system—the fastest by far in the region. They also studied the local market and saw a growing economy that can support another grocery store. This location will create hundreds of new jobs putting many people from Madison Heights and Hazel Park back to work.

In the northeast corner of the city, this Spring a new Golling Kia dealership will be built on 14 Mile Road. In the northwest corner, we will see new construction of the Woodspring Suites Hotel, a \$5.5 million dollar investment, bringing hundreds of new jobs to Madison Heights' northern border.

The largest employer in Madison Heights, Ascension Macomb-Oakland Hospital, also made a major investment by opening the new Ascension Michigan Urgent Care. Thank you President Terry Hamilton and your team for your continued investment in our community.

### **Multicultural Businesses**

Last year, you heard me talk about the nearly 200 Asian American owned businesses that call Madison Heights home, and our goal to build an identifiable brand around them. We are truly the de facto Chinatown of Metro Detroit. And this year proved it again with increased activity for Asian American businesses. In the past year alone, two Asian American festivals relocated to our city, with this summer's Asian Fest expected to attract thousands of guests.

I want to recognize two Asian American business owners that don't need introductions, Ricky Dong and his wife Cindy Wang. Ricky and Cindy's "can-do" entrepreneurial spirit and strong love of our city have led them to invest in real estate with the goal of creating a mini-China Town here in Madison Heights. Look no further than the booming activity around 168 Asian Mart (Michigan's largest Asian grocery market) including 168 KTV Bistro which was Metro Detroit's 6<sup>th</sup> best restaurant in 2018. Ricky and his partners have also acquired office space on

Ajax Drive, industrial land on Stephenson Highway, several commercial properties across Madison Heights, and in a few months, is the grand opening of his highly anticipated Korean BBQ and Hotpot restaurant. Clearly, the market has created Madison Heights Chinatown, let's celebrate and engage!

Speaking of celebration. A couple weeks ago, one of our 120 restaurants was given the highest honor from the Detroit Free Press food editor Mark Kurlyandchik. Ima, a noodle shop owned by Mike Ransom was named 2019 Detroit Free Press Restaurant of the Year. The... best... restaurant... in metro Detroit is in Madison Heights because of the creativity and passion of its owners but also because of the unique, valuable brand that our culturally-inclusive city has built the past few years.

### **Medical Marijuana**

If 2018 was the largest year on record for business investment, 2019 and 2020 will surpass it. This year, City Council adopted an ordinance authorizing 14 licenses for professional medical marijuana facilities under the system permitted by state law, the Medical Marijuana Facilities Licensing Act of 2016 signed by former Governor Snyder. Madison Heights was already home to medical marijuana caregivers growing plants in their homes for years. The new ordinance is not the caregiver model. Instead, we are inviting larger, professional businesses.

Our new ordinance makes several compromises based on input from residents. First, we will allow only two dispensaries. The other 12 businesses will be nondescript industrial and office uses including grows, processors, transporters, and scientific testing labs. You won't know they exist but for the hundreds of new jobs they create. Second, the new businesses must be 500 feet away from a residential district, school, church, or child care home.

I believe that City Council primarily adopted this ordinance from a place of compassion for the many suffering residents whose doctors recommended this substance for their care. The license application fees alone will pay for any city administrative cost. We don't foresee public safety issues and that is by design. Our 200 point scoring system for applicants will weed out bad actors and inexperienced business owners. Points will be awarded to those businesses with

a history and plan of charitable giving. We will give preference to those applicants with a professional license such as physicians, lawyers, or accountants. We also will give preference to those applicants spending the most money to rehab an abandoned or vacant industrial site.

If any of you own industrial real estate within our green map, you may have noticed the surging property values. For example, across the street is literally a dangerous condemned industrial building, formerly worthless, now valued at millions. Medical marijuana in Madison Heights will benefit patients, rehabilitate derelict industrial sites, create hundreds of new jobs, and pay for itself through fees and increased property values. I intend on being the mayor one year from now and I look forward to reporting on the progress.

### **Downtown**

We are into year two of the 20-year downtown plan and I'm excited to share some of the early successes we've achieved.

Last year, I announced the arrival of Woodpile BBQ. Its redevelopment of the former VFW Post is currently underway with an opening in May 2019. Please join me in thanking owners Brandon and Scott.

We also want to recognize Cadillac Straits Brewing Company for being the first microbrewery in our downtown. It is the exact type of cool business that our residents asked for during our town hall discussion. Owners Gordon and Gary will you please rise to be recognized?

In 2018, the downtown board planted trees, installed wayfinding signs and permanent public art, organized a student art competition, hosted the first ever open house at the south end fire station, and aggressively marketed the district's vacant sites. This new excitement and success will continue for the downtown, especially as we focus on beautification and branding. Expect more special events such as a food truck rally, a multicultural market, and a lot more art.

I want to highlight a recent event in downtown: the highly successful pop-up maker's exhibition hosted by Kymm and Crosby Clark, the owners of Clark's Fabrication. The event welcomed 15 artists, makers, and collectors, and attracted 250 visitors. The event was staged at a vacant strip

mall, transforming the space into a temporary art gallery. They raised over \$1,000 for the Madison Heights Arts Board to fund an outdoor mural. Kymm Clark is the chairperson of the city's Art Board and someone that exudes creativity. Because of her unique qualities, I want to do something I haven't done before at a State of the City Address. In recognition of Kymm Clark's service to the city, I want to present to her the first ever **Mayor's Ingenuity Award**. This award shall be given to a dreamer in Madison Heights who wakes up and takes action to build their vision of a better community. Madison Heights calls upon its residents to do, to make, to volunteer, to lead. In the City of Progress, "progress" is an action verb. This award should be given to someone who is not a critic; but a positive thinker. Not just present; but takes action. Never behind the times; always moving forward. Kymm Clark is an inventor, artist, business owner, leader, and is the future of Madison Heights. We need more of Kymm Clark. We need more people like Kymm Clark. This year, I present the first Mayor's Ingenuity Award to Kymm Clark to give warning to all those in her way because here comes the future.

### **Regionalism**

I want to say a few words about regional cooperation. Madison Heights and Hazel Park are at the crossroads of three counties. Two interstate highways intersect our communities. We may be small relative to our neighbors. However, if you combine our populations, we would be in the top 25 of largest Michigan cities. What I'm saying is that together the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as evidenced by the influence of our joint Chamber of Commerce and newspaper. I propose that our two cities explore additional ways to work together. I invite department heads from both Hazel Park and Madison Heights to discuss collaborations that will improve services to our residents. I invite both City Councils to renew your commitments to regional groups such as Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, Michigan Municipal League, and others. I ask our school, county, and state leaders to propose new ideas of working together. It may be as informal as attending your events, or more complex as entering interlocal agreements to eliminate duplication. To underscore my enthusiasm for cooperation, I want to announce another Mayor's award. This one I'll call the **Mayor's Cooperation Award**. This award goes to someone who has spent years building relationships that benefit Madison

Heights. The recipient is Emily Rohrbach. Emily's passion is helping and training women to enter leadership roles whether they are in government or business. She has helped launch the careers of countless leaders. She also mentors children to help them explore futures in government by making it relevant to them. Emily has built a network of powerful people that trust her. Please join me in thanking Emily for her unsung service to our community.

### **Public Safety--Police**

Now, I'd like to switch gears to the mechanics of city government. First, let's discuss public safety. The police department reopened our City's Special Investigation Unit to provide undercover police investigations. Since opening one month ago, we have already made several arrests including an important human trafficking case. The Police Department also hired three additional officers this past year and renovated the gun range to a state-of-the-art facility that is being shared by other law enforcement agencies in the area.

### **Public Safety--Fire**

The Fire Department hired two additional firefighters and was awarded the SAFER grant from the federal government to offset this expense. This has allowed us to purchase two replacement fire engines. Reliable equipment and staffing are priorities as our medical calls continue to increase. From 2009 to 2018, our calls for services increased 44%, with over 72% of these calls being for medical services.

### **Department of Public Services**

During winter, everyone notices the Department of Public Services as they do a great job keeping our streets clear of ice and snow. However, this department has been busy with a wide variety of activities including a citywide sewer main cleaning project and citywide water meter change-out program. DPS also supported the City's road repair and reconstruction programs, secured grant funding to replace the playground at Wildwood Park, and negotiated a 5-year contract extension with our solid waste contractor GFL.

## **Economic Development**

This upcoming year will be busy and exciting as we consider a Master Plan update, formalize an Economic Development marketing plan, and develop a citywide branding platform. We will be enhancing our community image through public relations and citizen engagement events. We recently applied for membership into the Main Street Oakland program through Oakland County, which will help us create a sense of place.

Members of City Council are attending seminars and drafting modern policies in response to the current needs of our residents. For example, Councilor Roslyn Grafstein has attended workshops on placemaking and green initiatives to beautify the city. Councilman David Soltis attended a county workshop on planning with several members of our downtown board. Mayor Pro Tem Mark Bliss is leading the city through an audit and repurposing of our advisory boards and commissions partly to identify the current needs and skills of our residents.

Despite the individual and collective successes I highlighted today, we must not forget the families in our two cities struggling with poverty. I propose that our cities host a joint Financial Empowerment Workshop to connect our residents facing economic hardship with resources that may lift them towards self-sufficiency. We must summon our connections to government, banks, trade schools, and social services to the benefit of our people.

## **Conclusion**

It takes a united community of residents, businesses, and volunteers to lift up our city in order for great things to happen. I would like to close by thanking our residents, businesses and volunteers. The people in our community make the City's future bright. Madison Heights is going places. Join us as we move toward the future. Thank you.