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Response to the Mayor's State of the City Speech

March 21, 2023

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining me.

Andy Ginther just finished presenting yet another of his state of the city addresses. He repeatedly proclaims advancements in nearly every aspect of what impacts the lives of neighborhoods, individuals and working families both socially and economically. He once again paints a picture of neighborhood improvements across the city. He continues to make promises that Columbus' great economic growth leads directly to well-paying jobs that are plentiful to everyone.

Andy Ginther's regular refrain that never has any credible evidence-is, "he believes in doing the right thing, and not what's easy or politically expedient." "Investing in roads and sidewalks that connect our community."

Yet our streets, bike lanes, curbs, roads, and sidewalks are crumbling all around us and unsafe for pedestrians and mobility. This is one of the first things that visitors to Columbus notice. In the 12 years that Ginther has been Council President and Mayor, across the city, neighborhood leaders and parents who are concerned for their children's safety, have never stopped calling for miles and miles of new sidewalks. And their pleas fall upon deaf ears.

Instead, hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars pour into infrastructure improvements in the Short North, Arena District, Crew Stadium's Astor Park, for the Convention Center, North Market District, Easton, and Scioto Peninsula. This is all to protect and enhance the investments of corporate Columbus and the luxury real estate developers who pull Ginther's puppet strings, control city policy, and fill his campaign coffers. None of this services the peoples of Columbus.

Public Education/Tax Abatements

The mayor talks about utilizing our city's income tax dollars to increase the quality of pre-school education. Yet he gave away more than \$617 million in tax abatements since he was elected. This resulted directly in the loss of well over \$217 million in revenue, \$52 million in fiscal year 2021 alone, that should have been spent directly on educating the children of our city in the Columbus Public Schools.

61% of students enrolled in Columbus Public are Black or multi-racial. If we do not provide the resources to educate our children fully, especially our Black and Brown children, how will they

escape poverty? How will we prevent them from seeking alternative illegal ways to gain financial stability?

As Mayor, my priority is to first address the underlying problems of structural racism and inequality that people face every day. I will not continue the long-standing pandering to Columbus' rich and powerful. Only when we prioritize and provide a proper public education for our children, public safety, decent affordable housing, adequate food and health care, access to mental health and childcare, jobs that pay a truly living wage, and a 21st century public transit system, will all Columbus residents have the basis for the success they deserve and the city we all need.

The mayor also boasts about the success of his tax incentive policy, continued from his predecessor and sponsor. Ginther's tax abatement policy plays a significant role in our county's inexcusably high 30% property foreclosure rate. These foreclosures result from senior citizens and low – moderate income homeowners inability to pay their escalating property taxes because of tax-abated homes and apartment developments near their pre-existing homes. Those new units are built solely to provide housing for the labor pool of corporate Columbus and established institutions.

Even the inadequate number of units set aside in exchange for developers 15-year, 100% tax abatements are well beyond the average income of a Black person (\$35,500) living in Columbus. I emphasize that those insufficient numbers of set aside units **are not** required of all developers who receive a tax abatement. The mayors favorites have an option to buy themselves out of that requirement.

We recently learned that tax abatements for the wealthy are beginning to expire for high priced condos in other parts of downtown Columbus. Finally, if ironically, much needed property tax revenue begins to filter back to our needy public schools. The report also stated that tax abatements will soon expire in other areas of downtown. In 2013 when Ginther was City Council President, he supported extending these downtown tax abatements for wealthy condo owners for an additional 15 years. That is outrageous and fiscally unsound. But you can all but guarantee that he will extend them again. There is absolutely no way in hell that will happen when I am your mayor.

Ginther alleges that tax abatements are job creators and that Columbus must provide such incentives because we compete for jobs with other municipalities. But at the same time the mayor grants tax abatements that promise no more than 2,5, and 10 jobs at a wage of \$15 an hour. These tax abatements do not benefit the working people. There is no trickle-down

economic impact. They do not address affordable housing. The mayor can only contradict himself.

His tax abatements are a gift that only fatten the bank accounts of real estate developers, corporate Columbus, and developers of logistic warehouses. Tax abatements are counterproductive. They contribute to Columbus as the second most economically segregated city in America. A friend of mine told me that tax abatements are in practice the equivalent, and indeed a product of structural racism. I agree.

Affordable Housing

I began to offer publicly, solutions to our city's affordable housing crisis 8 years ago in 2015 when I ran as write-In candidate for Columbus City Council. As part of a candidates questionnaire requested by Walker Evans of *Columbus Underground*, I was asked, "What Issues does Columbus succeed with that you hope to build on?" My response began, " Columbus is missing on a great opportunity to help provide additional affordable housing due to the recent construction boom of apartment buildings, townhouses and condominiums. I would propose that a small percentage of units be set aside for affordable housing.

In a Press Release dated October 12, 2017 I stated that "I was continuing to push forward on my development of city legislation requiring all new apartment projects to provide upwards of 20% of new units to be set aside for low-moderate income individuals and families." The city's current tax incentive policy is based on my own 2015 proposal. But City Council or the mayor will not acknowledge that they are repeating my own 8-year-old proposal.

Once again, on Thursday March 16, 2023, and as part of the Mayor's comments today, City Council and the mayor have co-opted, without any acknowledgement major portions of my Affordable Housing initiative. It has been circulated widely across public media for more than a year, along with portions of the Fair Housing Code ballot initiative for which I serve as a petition member.

Ginther knows very well that these are my proposals and that they have been for a long time. Instead of doing the work and research himself , he copies grassroots language and programs so he can keep up appearances. Since he doesn't have any ideas of his own, he steals them from the candidate who is going to replace him. Among the many differences between the mayor and me is that I have people to back me up that witness that I am actually doing the work. And I am not giving mere lip service as he does. When the smoke screen clears, the people of Columbus will see what is real and true, and what is not. The fact is, the mayor always makes promises like this during election years, but he never follows through. He does not remember them the next day.

That's because he doesn't have the political courage or the permission from those who control him to do what is right for the people and their city. We know better than to expect him not to keep his word and follow through on my affordable housing policies. I, on the other hand, will follow through with the Affordable Housing Policies that I will implement as Mayor. They include:

1. Commit \$60 million of city of Columbus American Rescue Plan funds. I will appeal to county officials and The Columbus Partnership to match the \$60 million dollar for dollar. This will create an immediate infusion of \$180 million to build affordable housing units for those with incomes of \$40,000 and less.
2. Increase the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Hotel-Motel Tax revenue share from 8.43% to 25%.
3. Create legislation to enact an Empty Homes Tax on vacant properties in order to incentivize and add more new single family home construction. This will also remove neighborhood eyesores and criminal activities from taking place on abandoned properties. The collected tax revenue from those who refuse to rehabilitate "empty homes" will go towards constructing affordable housing units and paying for housing repairs for low-moderate income homeowners.

To ensure that I am not co-opted on this proposal, my Excise Tax will also include vacant commercial properties located in our city's commercial business corridors. These include Livingston Avenue, Parsons Avenue, West Broad, Sullivant, Main Street, Long Street, Cleveland Avenue and others. Disinvestment by our mayor in our city's business corridors has gone on too long. We cannot continue to allow these corridors to deteriorate. We must provide opportunities for small business owners and entrepreneurs to thrive. By doing this, our neighborhoods will also benefit.

4. I will press The Columbus Partnership to establish its own Affordable Housing Trust Fund – It is finally time for them to become an actual "Partner," and not just an organization of wealthy capitalists who receives tax incentives and more than their fair share of infrastructure tax dollars that protect their investments.
5. I will lobby and hold Intel's feet to the fire. If need be, I will also use our water and sewer systems as leverage. I will have Intel commit to provide millions of dollars towards affordable housing. With more than \$2 billion in tax incentives from the state and tax dollars from other municipalities, along with federal CHIP's funding, Intel's handout is enormous and they are obligated to assist with our housing crisis.

6. I will spend tax dollars to purchase land in and close to our urban job centers. I will give that land to non-profit housing developers and Community Development Corporations to build housing solely for those who have incomes of \$45,000 and less. I will also use minority non-profit CDCs' and other non-profit affordable housing developers who haven't been corrupted by City Hall's pay to play system.
7. In a letter I have written to Nationwide Children's Hospital, I have encouraged them to spend about 2.25% (\$67.5 million) of their \$3.3 billion dollar expansion to construct no fewer than 100 affordable housing units for the hospitals low wage earner employees so they can walk to work.
8. I support the Fair Housing Code city-wide citizen driven ballot initiative. It will create a system of incentives for property owners to offer fair rents and disincentives for landlords and developers who engage in price gouging. Among other things, this ballot initiative will also give tenants more rights and allow them to sue their landlords when necessary .
9. I propose giving tax incentives to landlords of multi-unit apartment buildings who will keep rents affordable for low-moderate income renters.
10. I will require landlords to give tenants 6 months advance notice for rent increases.
11. If a tenant does not have the financial means to hire an attorney in response to an eviction, the city will provide free legal representation.
12. I will ensure that there is adequate new affordable housing constructed for those with disabilities, special needs, and for veterans.

Since 2021, there have been 36,500 evictions filed, almost 300 homeless in Columbus have died, and about 60,000 people are paying 50% or more of their incomes for rent. This affordable housing crisis has stared Mayor Ginther in the face for 7 years. There is absolutely no reason for anyone to think that he will do anything about it now. All we hear is the same old election year sloganeering and empty promises. People are suffering because of his lack of action.

Crime Prevention/ Community Policing/Police Reform

On March 13th, Columbus tragically recorded its 30th homicide of the year. This is the second fastest rate since 2015 that the city reached that number. This puts Columbus on pace for the second worse year in our city's history.

The City of Columbus has multiple crime and policing problems. They are never acknowledged by public officials nor confronted directly. Too many of them result directly from both the actions and inactions of the mayor. This must change now.

Given the city's inactions and its silence, we must ask: Why is it easier for our youth to possess illegal drugs or a gun than it is for them to secure a decent public education and housing? This cannot continue.

Ginther's private developer driven tax abatement policy defunds public education along with many other public services. This reduces our children's ability to escape poverty. At the same time, it directly increases the likelihood of increasing crime. To address crime prevention and violence directly, I believe that Columbus must focus first on the underlying problems. Decent affordable housing, public education, and neighborhood and commercial infrastructure reinvestment working together will help to reduce our rising crime rate.

As the President of the Tuttle Park Community Recreation Council for the last 32 years, I witnessed decades of budget cuts within the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department. The CRPD was once the leader among city departments that provided a broad range of activities for our youth. This department's budget must be restored so that it can help to provide youth activities and mentoring programs.

Because of the City's uncontrolled and unaccountable \$20 million buyout of 100 police officers contracts and others who have retired, Ginther radically increased an already existing shortage of qualified and properly trained officers. Many experienced, high-quality officers were literally driven out of the force.

Accepting Lateral Transfer into the department is a failure. The CPD's recreating and bringing back the Jump Out Boys is one of the most reckless and ill-conceived ideas yet. If the murder of Tyre Nichols wasn't enough to warn our police chief that such a unit is a recipe for disaster, then this community will continue to lose all trust in our police chief, the mayor, city council and the Public Safety Director. Why does Ginther not learn from the ongoing experiences of cities across the U.S.?

More than ever, how an officer utilizes his or her time on the job is crucial. For example, having police officers sitting in their cruisers while city paid contractors bulldoze a homeless encampment is a gross waste of tax dollars and time. It also looks very bad and traumatizes the homeless who are being misplaced.

We need to minimize the use of police officers for non-violent offenses and calls that are related to mental health issues and other non-police emergencies. Cities around the US

demonstrate that Community Policing reduces crime and boosts trust within neighborhoods. It contributes to much needed legitimacy with everyone in need and their neighbors.

We also need trauma outreach programs for the families of those whose loved ones who suffer serious injury or death by law enforcement. Law enforcement also must have proper resources for addressing their own trauma. Are officers given sufficient leaves of absence after investigating murder scenes that involve children or other unimaginable accidents? We need to make sure that they are. Should officers be rotated from precincts where violent crime is more prevalent in order to help with their own mental wellbeing? This is also something that must be considered.

Utilizing more funds for community policing/mental health response teams is effective. Not only do these teams allow officers to respond to more serious violent crimes and conduct neighborhood patrolling, but the presence of a police officer on mental health calls can be traumatizing for those in need of help. I support the creation of “sub-stations” for non-response teams to be stationed within various precincts throughout the city.

Twenty years ago, as candidate in a Columbus City Council primary election, I called for more bicycle and foot patrols. I continue to do so. Police officers must be familiar with their patrol areas. The present 80 percent of officers who live outside the city often do not know their zones and precincts. They should know the owners of local small businesses and their customers, visit neighborhood schools and recreation centers, and talk to residents on sidewalks and front porches. These contacts build mutual knowledge and trust, and thus a safer city. Police should be familiar with the social and cultural makeup of the neighborhoods that they patrol.

There is also success in multi-faceted street level crime prevention programs in Black and low-income neighborhoods. This city must actively reinvest in these commercial corridors while supporting small business owners. It must reclaim vacant and public spaces, and upgrade the overall infrastructure in these neighborhoods. When young people feel a sense of community and pride in their neighborhoods, promoted by respected “community ambassadors,” “bad things” diminish.

I also support non-profit community-based programs that utilize private residential citizen owned cameras to monitor high crime areas. Video footage is recorded 24/7. The cameras and operation of these programs save taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars each year. Organized citizen networks advance the ability to enforce accountabilities for all crimes, and provide swift effective critical sharing of evidence with police.

Columbus must learn more quickly and actively from successful programs in other cities. One major example is responsible gun buy-back programs. Without pretending that we can ever remove all firearms from the streets or inappropriate owners, programs that offer \$200-250 for each firearm surrendered radically reduce guns in the hands of those might use them for robberies when they cannot afford food or meet other basic needs, as well as from persons who have no good reason to have a gun at home.

As most of you know, Ginther appointed Hilliard resident and democratic attorney Rena Shak as Director of the Office of Violence Prevention. I think it is important to note that the Office of Violence Prevention was the idea of former Franklin County Coroner Dr. Anahi Ortiz. I am sure Ms. Shak is a fine attorney, but it's also odd that after losing her election as a Municipal Court Judge to Republican Gina Russo in 2021, Ginther for some reason felt the need to hire her as his own personal legal counsel. Which I believe is a first for a mayor in this city. Why would you need your own legal counsel when you have 60 attorneys already at your convenience? And as a party insider, I question her being independent and someone who won't make waves. And just how her performance will be measured? And the creation of this office and some of Ginther's other ideas reminds me of a quote by Desmond Tutu, "that sometimes we have to stop pulling people out of the water, and go upstream to find out why they keep falling in."

Police Reform

As a 14 -year construction safety professional, I personally understand the need for a civic culture that exists from the top of an organization to the lowest levels. Within the Columbus Division of Police, this shared civic culture must begin with the Chief and Assistant Chief and progress down to the sergeants and the officers they supervise. It must stop both its dependence on unnecessary use of force especially against young Black men. It must stop its "cover up culture" from those in command and end the persisting practice of protecting "bad cops".

If Columbus is to achieve the level of accountability and community trust that we desperately need, we can no longer tolerate the "blue code of silence." The Chief of Police and other high-ranking officers who have the authority to discipline officers must do so as a matter of course.

If this cannot be done, then the City must stop protecting bad officers from misconduct through qualified immunity. We cannot continue to bail out bad cops who know they will not face substantial disciplinary actions because their livelihoods will be saved with million-dollar city tax dollar settlement checks. Police officers must no longer be trained like soldiers but as guardians, to protect all the people. A police officer's personnel files on both misconduct and

commendations should be part of their permanent record until they leave the force. The entire force urgently needs much more and improved training on de-escalation tactics.

Addressing our Unsheltered and Creating Transitional Housing

When it comes to addressing the needs of our city's unsheltered, Ginther is clueless on what to do. He continues to write checks, dishes them out and washes his hands of the problem. His reactionary solutions to this city's social and economic needs is not meeting anyone's needs. Spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on bulldozing homeless encampments while police officers watch from their cruisers confirms that his policies are inhumane and he is unfit to lead.

A record number of evictions were filed in Franklin County in 2022 of almost 21,000 people. That is a 41% increase from 2021 when 13,500 were evicted. In addition, 2,694 students in Franklin County were reported as homeless last year. And in 2022, at least 154 people died from homelessness. My "Housing First" initiative is a humane step in the direction of remaking the city to serve its residents.

1. I will create an Office of Transitional Housing. It will support my "Housing First" initiative.
2. This will be funded with federal (HUD), state, county and city dollars. It will demand the support of corporate sponsorships, our local social and public health agencies, faith-based organizations congregations.
3. We will construct Tiny Home Communities consisting of perhaps 20-30 150 square foot units with each one containing a dorm style frig, wall heaters, cots with a mattress, fire extinguisher, and storage for clothing and necessities. Each community will provide security, hand washing stations, garbage services, bathroom facilities, electricity, a centralized kitchen and potable water. Wrap around services will be provided to address mental health issues, substance abuse, and to provide employment opportunities.
4. We will construct or rehab multi-unit dwellings for transitional public housing .
5. For those who are living in encampments, we will provide portable toilets and 10-yard dumpsters until residents can be relocated into transitional housing.
6. The city will construct its own warming centers. These facilities will be utilized for other purposes during off-seasons.
7. We will have contract with hotels to lease rooms for short-term transitional housing if needed.

8. We will partner with ADAMH to create a 24/7 Harm Reduction Shelter Center specifically designated for those who are suffering from substance abuse disorders.
9. This Office will coordinate with Veterans' groups and organizations who assist those who have been incarcerated who need transitional housing.
10. The Office of Transitional Housing will be responsible for administering a Municipal ID program.

Office of Anti-Corruption

City Hall and some of the mayor's division directors unethically and allegedly illegally, make deals with private developers and contractors while no one questions them. Middle management city employees must take orders or lose their jobs. This is not to mention the many years that developers and others connive to get around laws and rules. In return for campaign contributions, and under the table pay-offs, elected and unelected city officials pander to these large contributors and well connected politically powerful city lobbyists.

City Hall overflows ripe with corruption. My own Ohio Ethics charges against the Public Service Director are ongoing. Ginther's involvement alone with Redflex, Centerplate, the Crew Stadium deal, and the State Route 315 Ohio Health ramp are well documented. There is the Little Turtle Road Improvement project, and former Mayor Michael Colemans house sale to a Chinese businesswoman. Those are just the ones that have been exposed most often. The City of Columbus completely refuses to regulate itself.

The FBI called the Ohio Statehouse the most corrupt in the country. They need to focus on Columbus City Hall that is only two blocks away. I will create an Office of Anti-Corruption. We need end to our city governments unethical practices and the lack of transparency, accountability, and an anti-democratic city government that is unmatched by any major city in America. My Office of Anti-Corruption will:

1. Dissolve the city's existing Ethics Office. It is non-functional in enforcing the city's Ethics and Conduct Policy.
2. Replace the Chief Ethics Officer with a non-partisan Inspector General who will investigate alleged unethical and corrupt behaviors of city employees and city elected officials.
3. Establish a strictly confidential whistle blower hotline and discipline city employees and elected officials who are privy to unethical and corrupt activities and do not report them.

4. City of Columbus campaign finance reports are an additional burden to grass root challengers and another undemocratic hurdle for them to deal with. These finance reports are already required to be filed with the Franklin County BOE and easily accessible to the public for review. I will remove this unnecessary redundancy and taxpayer cost.
5. I will prohibit the solicitation or acceptance of campaign contributions from all vendors, developers and other persons or groups who have a financial interest in city business while such business is pending before city council.
6. I will prohibit all former elected city, county, state and federal officials along with former directors and administrators from serving as City of Columbus legislative lobbyists.

Environment/Transit/Mobility

I was asked recently, when I began active in the community, I shared this story with:

I have defended the environment since the first Earth Day in 1970. In 8th grade, my teacher charged my classmates and me with an Earth Day project. I chose to demonstrate against pollution. My father helped me to build a wooden box with a lid. It that was 5 feet long, 2 feet wide and 20 inches deep. I filled it with trash and garbage. The box represented a casket. My classmates and I marched together and they helped me to carry it around the block to the back yard of my garage where we buried it. This was meant to symbolize that pollution kills. Now of course I was 13-years old and in 8th grade.

But seriously, over the years I fought against development projects that would negatively impact the environment of Darby Creek, Pickerington Ponds Nature Preserve, and the Morse-Bethel Connector. More recently, I fought beside residents of the Little Turtle Civic Association while we tried to save the historic grand greenway entrance into their community from the construction of the corrupt Little Turtle Roadway Improvement Project.

I served as one of the original Board members for the local watershed group The Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed. And I have led the Tuttle Park Community Recreation Council as its President for 31 years while transforming Tuttle Park into one the city's premier parks and recreation centers.

As some of you know, compared to a few of Columbus' peer cities like Pittsburgh , Louisville and Cincinnati, our tree canopy is only 22% . Those 3 cities tree canopy ranges between 40% and 37%. It appears that the mayor's climate action plan is going in reverse.

Just two days ago a report was issued stating that Columbus, Ohio had the worst air quality in the United States. The contributing factor being carbon dioxide. This past Monday a United Nations panel of scientists that study climate change stated, "Humanity is on thin ice." For too long this city has sacrificed woodlands, trees, and greenspace for economic development without tree or other environmental replacement policies. Why should we believe that the mayor is going to do something about it now? Because he says so during another election year?

In July 2021 I was contacted by a resident of the Walnut Creek Commons in Columbus and near Little Turtle. Next to their one-acre property sat 27.88 acres of woodlands that was home to wild turkeys, fox, deer, owls, hawks, raccoons, numerous bird species, wetlands, natural springs and vernal pools.

A well-known developer sought a variance to develop the nearly 28 acres with 156 one- and two-bedroom single family rental units. Of course the developer hired one of the city's most politically connected zoning law firms that just happens to be a huge campaign contributor, to secure a zoning variance. Despite a near majority opposition of the development from nearby neighbors, the variance was unanimously approved. 25 and the 27.88 acres of woodlands, wetlands, vernal pools, and natural springs was decimated. There was no mitigation for tree replacement.

The city recklessly destroys its limited natural endowment. This is especially true with respect to the banks of the Scioto River where architecturally unattractive hotels and apartments are approved. This took place recently over the objections of the city's own Department of Recreation and Parks. Also, our treasured Metro Parks are under attack from development.

Columbus is decades behind all of its urban peer cities in the effort to create a 21st century transit system and mobility standards. I fully support a more reliable and efficient transit system and free transit.

Our city's pedestrian crosswalks are poorly marked. We urgently need modified traffic signals that allow pedestrians to safely cross streets, and more flashing beacons at crosswalks. There seem to be no traffic police. Pedestrians get struck by vehicles in crosswalks and the driver of the vehicle does not get cited. Sidewalks, as well as streets are blocked with scooters, bicycles (lack of bike racks), advertising benches or if construction is taking place.

I have bicycled my entire life. I bike for enjoyment, to go to work, and for exercise. I am defined by bike advocates as an "enthused and confident" bike rider. Meaning that I feel relatively safe riding on the streets of Columbus without protected bike lanes. But I completely

understand the need for protected lanes for the majority of bike riders who do not feel safe on the streets of Columbus and support the construction of protected bike lanes.

Ending

As a city, our priorities should not be waving great fanfare about the latest unattractive new gentrifying market-rate apartment buildings or tallish skyscrapers in downtown Columbus. Columbus has always lacked something that can truly identify itself with the rest of the country. I want to be a city that we can all be proud of and how other city's will look at us in terms of our innovative and thoughtful ways on how we address the social and economic ills of our homeless, seniors, our Black and Brown people, affordable housing solutions, community policing, 21st century transit and mobility, and democracy.

The people are not being fooled anymore by Ginther's slogans, "Opportunity for all" and "Opportunity Rising." We all know that means "opportunity for a few" and "opportunity for selected bank accounts to rise." As mayor, I will stop punishing the have nots and uplift everyone. Real change will only happen when we have a mayor whose priorities are for the people and of the people. And not developers, corporations and their lobbyist.

Thank you all for joining me this afternoon and I humbly ask for your support this November.