

City of Miami Beach

City Manager

Summary of Articles

James Hardy

(Note: Articles Follow In Reverse Chronicle Order)

Articles

- *Housing Development Projects on Rise in Akron*, Akron.com, January 21, 2021.
- *New and Pandemic-Delayed Projects Push Akron Construction Projects Over \$400 Million in 2021*, Utilities Monitor Worldwide, December 25, 2020.
- *Akron Defends Housing Proposal; Critics, Woodbridge Schools Protests Merriman Project*, Akron Beacon Journal, December 16, 2020.
- *Akron-Area Leaders and Residents Wednesday Lit Up Twitter*, Akron Beacon Journal, August 20, 2020.
- *City Buys App Designed to Support Local Businesses Israeli Company was Paid \$32,500 for Purchase*, Plain Dealer, August 14, 2020.
- *Akron Set to Launch New App to Boost Small Businesses & Civic Pride*, WKYC Studios, June 19, 2020.
- *Akron Sets 'Framework' to Improve, Grow City in Five Years*, Akron Beacon Journal, December 3, 2019.
- *Akron Streamlines City Departments into New Office of Integrated Development*, Crain's Cleveland Business, December 1, 2019.
- *Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development, James Hardy, Named A 2019 Crain's Cleveland Business "Forty Under 40" Honoree*, City of Akron, November 19, 2019.
- *Akron's James Hardy: More Action, Less Talk Will Get Stuff Done*, Crain's Cleveland Business, September 30, 2018.
- *Akron's Chief of Staff Tells Cleveland Leaders to 'Get Your Shit Done' at FlashStarts Event*, Cleveland Scene, September 11, 2018.
- *Rubber City Rising; 'Unprecedented' Development is Helping to Reshape Downtown Akron*, Crain's Cleveland Business, July 16, 2018.
- *Former Akron Police Chief Sues Akron Over His Resignation; City Denies Allegations*, Akron Beacon Journal, July 10, 2018.
- *Mayor's Chief of Staff Says Report 'Completely False'*, Akron Beacon Journal, March 28, 2018.
- *Former Akron School Board Member James Hardy Appointed City's Transition Coordinator, Chief of Staff*, Akron Beacon Journal, December 1, 2015.

Websites

- Alumni Spotlight, Kent State University - <https://www.kent.edu/publichealth/news/alumni-spotlight-james-hardy>
- City of Akron - <https://www.akronohio.gov/cms/site/31c26108aa941801/index.html>

- Greater Akron Chamber - <https://greaterakronchamber.org/misc/2021/james-hardy-bio>
- James J. Hardy, Governing - <https://www.governing.com/authors/James-J-Hardy.html>
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-hardy-mph-027b7161/>

Video

- James Hardy, City of Akron: G.S.D. – Moving from Collaboration to Coordination – *YouTube* – September 17, 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IH4pNW_Nuk

Audio

- Podcast: Supporting Akron Businesses During COVID-19 with James Hardy and Michael Mazur – *GovLove A Podcast About Local Government (ELGL)* – September 1, 2020 <https://elgl.org/podcast-supporting-akron-businesses-during-covid-19-with-james-hardy-and-michael-mazur/>

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON RISE IN AKRON

AKRON.COM

Eric Poston
January 21, 2021

Several proposed and under construction housing development projects are one way City of Akron officials are hoping will grow the city's population.

Some of the projects have been met with opposition from residents, who have voiced their concerns to the Akron Planning Commission and Akron City Council.

Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development James Hardy said not only does Akron want to grow its population, but also its housing stock that would draw people to the city.

According to the city's Planning to Grow Akron report released in 2017, the city's peak population occurred in 1960 with 290,000 residents. Since 1960, the city has lost 31 percent of its population, and in 2017, the population was 198,000.

The report states a goal was to grow the city's population to 200,000 by 2020 and then to 250,000 by 2050.

Hardy said the city is waiting on the 2020 U.S. Census data for an update on the current population. He said Akron's infrastructure was built to serve 300,000 people, and with a current population under 200,000, taxes and fees go up for remaining residents to cover the shortfall.

"We don't have 100,000 less sewer lines," Hardy said.

Akron City Councilman Shammus Malik (D-Ward 8) said the city "absolutely" needs to grow its population. He echoed many of Hardy's sentiments.

Hardy said between 2010 and 2017, the city demolished on average 500 homes per year. He said since 2017, the number of home demolitions has been reduced "substantially," with 200 to 250 homes currently demolished each year.

The Planning to Grow Akron report in 2017 also stated the city was only building 10 new homes each year.

"We now have over 1,200 units available, under construction or in development," said Hardy, referencing new housing since 2018.

He added the housing stock in Akron is still relatively old and the floor plans may not be what people are looking for in today's market.

“As the baby boomers exit homeownership, it is increasingly difficult to sell to millennials,” Hardy said. “People in their teens and 20s — the buyers of tomorrow — are not looking for what we have to offer.”

While Akron features more older homes, he said, the city does offer a lot of what people want around a neighborhood, such as parks, shopping and restaurants.

City officials plan to release the Planning to Grow Akron 2.0 report in March, which will show an overview of housing since 2017. Hardy said while new construction has “skyrocketed” downtown and with new larger housing developments, the problem still exists with vacant lots in neighborhoods where homes were demolished.

Hardy added it is “really difficult” financially to make new home projects in existing neighborhoods work.

“We don’t have enough affordable housing in the city,” said Hardy of a problem he believes is not unique to Akron. “We desperately need federal housing reform.”

Last fall, a group of citizens concerned about development in Merriman Valley formed the Preserve the Valley group. Carolyn Spivak Colbow, a spokesperson for the group, said it is “not anti-development.” “We want to find a way for citizens to be involved more in the process,” she said.

With Planning Commission and City Council committee meetings taking part in the middle of the day online via the Zoom videoconferencing application, it can be “difficult” for citizens to be part of the process, she added.

The group has approximately 12 core members and 400 newsletter subscribers. She added that anyone who wants to be involved with the group should visit preservethevalley.com.

Residential property tax abatement program

In an effort to spur housing construction in the city and increase the city’s population, Akron City Council approved in 2017 a residential property tax abatement program that provides tax breaks for new residential construction and renovation projects valued at approximately \$5,000 or more.

According to city officials, the abatement allows owners to pay taxes solely on the pre-improvement assessed value of the residential property for 15 years after improvements are completed. At the end of the 15 years, the property will be taxed at its post-improvement assessed value.

Schools and other property tax-funded organizations will continue to receive all tax revenues they currently receive, according to city officials.

Akron Public Schools Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer Ryan Pendleton said the district is supportive of the city’s residential tax abatement.

“Prior to the tax abatement, there was very little new construction,” Pendleton said. “A good, healthy and vibrant community depends on growth.”

He said if the district was in a growing suburb, the school board and administration might have a different perspective on the tax abatement.

While the district has to wait 15 years for the extra tax revenues, the abatement also provides the opportunity to grow the district's student population, he said. Currently, the district's student capacity is between 80 and 85 percent, with room for additional students without needing to expand the district's buildings footprint, he said.

"Any new construction gives an opportunity for a family to move in," Pendleton said.

Pendleton also said the district received the first positive property appraisals since 2008, which he said is a "good sign."

Riverwoods Golf Course development

The 76-acre site at 1870 Akron-Peninsula Road was the former Riverwoods Golf Course & Driving Range. The property is now owned by Petros Homes Inc., which is proposing to construct 197 townhomes, with 169 of them being for rent and 28 for sale.

Petros CEO Sam Petros said a combination of factors made the property attractive to the company, including the demand in the market and the 15-year residential tax abatement being offered by Akron.

He said there are some people who "really love" the valley and are "stewards" of the valley.

"The idea of living in the valley is very attractive," Petros said.

He called the style of one-story townhomes proposed "attractive," with no common shared areas and featuring an outdoor patio.

Petros said the target market for the new townhomes is professionals and those who are semi-retired.

According to the proposed plans, 45 acres of the property would be dedicated public open space. Petros said this project should be the "poster board" development considering the amount of green space being preserved. Without the tax abatement, Petros said, the development would not have been able to happen.

Hardy said the city doesn't have a lot of ranch-style housing and these townhomes would be ideal for those over age 60.

Malik added he is recusing himself from discussions and voting on the Riverwoods project due to a potential conflict with the law firm for which he previously worked.

Theiss, Hardy roads development

In August 2020, the city solicited proposals for residential development of a 45-acre Theiss Road site, which is bordered by Theiss Road to the north and west, with Northampton Road as the eastern border and Hardy Road as the southern border.

According to city officials, the Theiss Road property appears to have been used as farmland from approximately 1937 to 1970.

The city received five proposals for residential development of the 45 acres, with at least 13.5 acres to be maintained as open space. Last month, the city announced plans to seek full conservation proposals as an alternative to residential development proposals, and these are being accepted until March 31.

Once the conservation proposals are received, city officials will review them along with the residential proposals and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Malik said he is “thankful” the city is looking at conservation proposals and said he has had a lot of “positive” conversations with conservation groups regarding the property.

“The city owns [the property],” Malik said. “We are the deciders.”

Spivak Colbow said Preserve the Valley has an online petition with over 12,500 signatures opposing a housing development for the land.

Residence at Good Park

In July 2020, Council approved a conditional-use permit to establish a residential development at the southwest corner of Mull and South Hawkins avenues.

The 11.6-acre site was home to Perkins Middle School, which was demolished.

Plans call for 82 total units consisting of 34 townhomes, 23 single-family homes and 24 custom-home lots, according to Tom Fuller, executive director for Alpha Phi Alpha Homes. Fuller estimates the project is just under \$20 million.

Hardy said other new housing projects in Akron include the Crossing at Auld Farm on Diagonal Road, The Homes on Hickory off Memorial Parkway and several housing projects in Downtown Akron.

Malik added moving forward there will be a mix of housing and conservation projects.

Impact on school districts

Woodridge Local Schools Superintendent Walter Davis said the biggest concern with proposed residential development on Akron properties located in the district is a combination of Akron’s residential tax abatement and the possible influx of new students.

Both the Riverwoods and Theiss Road developments are in the Woodridge Local School District.

“When these kinds of things [developments] happen, we end up learning about them as the general public hears about them,” Davis said.

He added when development projects are proposed in the City of Cuyahoga Falls, the city reaches out, but that hasn’t been the case with Akron.

“Not knowing what is coming makes it difficult to plan,” Davis said.

He said he has had several conversations with Malik, whose ward includes Merriman Valley and the Theiss Road area, as the district has approximately 700 students who live in Akron Wards 1, 2 and 8.

“When the City of Akron seeks to grow population through residential development using schemes that offer developers and builders tax abatement, the Woodridge School District loses,” Davis said. “With no say in the matter, our board is assuming responsibility for the education of Akron resident children without tax support for the 15-year term of the tax abatement.”

Davis said the average student is in the district for 13 years, so it is possible a student who lives in a home that received the 15-year tax abatement could go through the district at very little cost to the property owner.

“There will be a loss of revenue to the school district, but yet we will be responsible for the cost of the education of these kids,” said Woodridge Treasurer Tom Morehouse. “With the way that schools are currently funded, there would be no additional money in our foundation, as the state of Ohio is currently flat funding schools regardless of any increase or decrease in [number of] students.”

Morehouse said even if a student moves into these new housing areas and open-enrolls in their previous school district, if possible, the open-enrollment dollars would still come from Woodridge. If a child opted to attend a private school, there could be transportation costs for Woodridge, he added.

“These types of abatements really are not fair to the current taxpayers of our school district,” Morehouse said. “They will be paying for the cost to educate these children.”

Davis said in commercial abatement scenarios there is often incentives or payments in lieu of taxes that are offered to the schools to offset the losses.

“Thus far, with this proposed development [Riverwoods], there has been no discussion, no talk at all with the schools about anything, let alone any financial incentives,” Davis said.

This school year, a Woodridge education will cost over \$11,000 per child, he added.

“As a district that receives less than \$700 per pupil annually in state aid, we are heavily reliant on property tax revenues for the majority of our budget,” Davis said.

Hardy said city officials studied tax abatements in other cities similar to Akron and felt “strongly” about it for new developments and infill housing. He added the residential tax abatement does not abate any existing taxes and school districts stand to gain additional revenue after the 15-year period.

“The tax abatement is making infill housing work,” Hardy said. “It is really helping jumpstart new construction we couldn’t get before.”

He predicts over time property values will increase, which also will benefit school districts.

“We are not in the business to harm school districts,” Hardy said.

He added it is unclear who will move into new developments proposed in Woodridge's boundaries, but if there were an excessive number of students, city officials would be willing to work out a solution with district officials.

Valley Master Plan

Davis and Morehouse want to see a pause on development until the creation of a master plan for the valley, something Cuyahoga Falls and Akron have allocated money to do.

"We are ready to be a partner in that [the master plan]," Davis said. "It seems if we all sat down and brainstormed, we could all benefit."

Morehouse said Woodridge is not against developments, nor Akron growing.

"I believe the more population that Summit County can have will benefit everyone in the future," Morehouse said. "However, I believe it would be beneficial for everyone to work together. Woodridge would like to also be more informed as new developments proceed, not read about them in the newspaper."

Malik said the master plan would be "beneficial" and "helpful" in guiding the future of the valley.

Spivak Colbow said the Preserve the Valley group would also like to see a pause on development until the master plan is completed. She added the plan will bring both Akron and Cuyahoga Falls together along with stakeholders to share a vision for the valley.

"We want residents to express their hopes and visions for the valley along with their concerns," said Spivak Colbow, adding she would like to see a town hall meeting scheduled where residents can engage in the process.

NEW AND PANDEMIC-DELAYED PROJECTS PUSH AKRON CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS OVER \$400 MILLION IN 2021

UTILITIES MONITOR WORLDWIDE

Utilities Monitor Worldwide
December 25, 2020

Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan is using the city's 2021 capital budget to pitch City Council on a systematic, neighborhood-driven revitalization of all 12 community centers with guidance from architects.

Ranked by condition with the worst up first, the plan would set aside \$2 million to renovate or reimagine one community center at a time starting in 2022 with Ed Davis in West Akron, Reservoir Park in Goodyear Heights and Patterson Park in North Hill.

The city would hire engineers and consultants at Prime AE, a national firm with an office in Akron, to begin asking residents what they want from their community centers.

James Hardy, who leads Horrigan's Office of Integrated Development, said he wanted to replicate how the city used architects and community surveys to decide this year to replace, instead of patching up, the city's two outdoor swimming pools and aquatic facilities at Reservoir Park and Perkins Woods, which is a stone's throw from Ed Davis.

First, the city's Building Maintenance Division conducted an internal audit to see which centers are in the worst condition.

A lot of them are in really rough shape, really rough shape, which we will show in the Council hearings, Hardy said of introducing the plan publicly in January when City Council is briefed on the entire 2021 capital budget. So far, the plan has been introduced to the city's planning commission. It likely won't be passed by Council until February.

Up from \$329 million originally budgeted in 2020, the \$414 million spending plan for all infrastructure projects and equipment purchases in the coming year, including state and federal projects within the city limits, marks the final days of the half-demolished Rubber Bowl. The iconic stadium most recently used as a canvas by graffiti artists would be completely covered in dirt and seeded with grass by a \$360,000 line item in next year's budget. A portion of the structure that helps to fortify George Washington Boulevard would remain intact, but buried.

Immediate priorities

The budget blueprint projects what the city hopes to afford in 2021. Some projects, like a new police headquarters or municipal courthouse, will take a few more years of squirreling away revenue, chasing grants or securing loans before the city and its partners can break ground.

The new outdoor swimming pools, for example, will cost \$9 million, of which only \$700,000 will be borrowed in 2021. The \$9 million is all-in for the design, removal and construction of new pools and poolhouses, starting with Perkins Woods in 2022 then Reservoir in 2023.

Hardy said the 2021 plan reflects the largest annual commitment for street resurfacing in the history of the city: \$13.9 million. Horrigan began 2020 with a plan to repave nearly 60 miles of city streets. That plan was slashed by a third as the pandemic threatened to gut the city's income tax revenue, which includes an extra 0.25 percent passed in 2017 for public safety and roads. Some of the delayed roadwork has carried into the city's record-setting resurfacing budget for 2021.

Work on a new **Fire Station 12** in Wallhaven, also postponed by the pandemic, should get underway in 2021.

Road studies in 2021 will determine the configuration and scope of complete street projects on Main Street north of the All-American Bridge and East Exchange Street in front of the University of Akron. Construction on Exchange Street, the furthest along of the two projects, will begin in 2022 and finish with two car lanes in either direction, which the city learned is essential after experimenting with fewer lanes and jamming traffic.

Water and sewer projects again account for more than half of all the money scheduled to be spent in the city from numerous revenue streams. The water and sewer projects total \$234 million of the \$414 million spending plan, with the court-mandated combined sewer project responsible for nearly half (\$111 million) of the city's new plumbing.

The biggest of these jobs in 2021 will be at the Water Reclamation Facility on Akron-Peninsula Road, where sewage and runoff flow for treatment. Work spilling into 2021 includes \$24.5 million for a new tank and Biological Chemically Enhanced Primary Treatment (BioCEPT) system, which helps break down waste, and a \$35.2 million upgrade to the grit removal system, which can screen 150 million gallons of water today and could process up to 280 million gallons a day when completed. The city applied for a \$97 million low-interest state loan in November 2019 for the entire grit removal upgrade project, also known as the headworks improvements.

'Back in business'

Compared to his first budget in 2016, the mayor is again setting out to double spending on parks and recreation, a goal sidelined in 2020 when programs like the yearly Akron Parks Challenge were canceled due to the pandemic. While overall revenue was held harmless by federal CARES Act and COVID-19 grants, the pandemic prompted bond rating agencies to downgrade the city, a move that makes it more costly to borrow.

With vaccines rolling out, Hardy said the city is back to business with the 2021 capital budget. Three grants of \$100,000 each will again be distributed, as they were in 2019 and 2018, to the best community-driven ideas for revitalizing neighborhood park space.

That's the theme of the 2021 budget, Hardy said, reorienting the budget toward neighborhoods.

Some of the biggest line items outside of water, sewer and street improvements are still downtown, specifically the second phase of the Main Street Corridor (from Mill Street to State Route 59) and a complete facelift of Lock 3. But those projects are primarily not funded by the city.

The Main Street Phase II project, which like its predecessor was awarded a federal TIGER grant, is a \$15.5 million project. Only \$2.3 million needs to be repaid by income tax collections or water and sewer customers. Likewise, the city is borrowing \$500,000 for the \$2.75 renovation of Lock 3, which is largely funded by the Knight Foundation, designed by the Akron Civic Commons and managed by the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition.

Neighborhoods in focus

Where Hardy sees the money flowing is to neighborhoods and their business districts.

A road safety study will examine the length of Copley Road, where parking lots for businesses hang dangerously close to the street and a road diet that cut out a traffic lane to deter speeding and side-swiping inadvertently increased more minor fender benders. Elsewhere, complete street projects are meant to complement Great Street areas with more business-friendly traffic patterns in North Hills Temple Square or East Market Street through the heart of Middlebury.

Kerr Park in the heart of West Akron is getting a \$75,000 facelift. And baseball fields will be converted to soccer fields at Lane Field, which was another 2020 project sidelined by the pandemic in 2020. The new fields are in response to the need for better suited recreational programming from community organizations like Akron Inner City Soccer Club, Hardy said.

With no home field, Oladele Olabisi, who founded the soccer club in 1999, hasn't been able to teach the basics of soccer to youth, like corner kicks from sideline hashes that don't exist on the grass fields he finds to practice on.

"It's been very, very difficult for us," said Olabisi, whose program serves 200 kids in the spring and fall and 400 in summer. Playing at Lane Field would be a drastic improvement, in more ways than how the kids learn the game.

"Without having somewhere to practice" with toilets nearby, Olabisi explained, "we have to put them in the car and run them to McDonalds then bring them back." 2020 Global Data Point.

AKRON DEFENDS HOUSING PROPOSAL; CRITICS, WOODBIDGE SCHOOLS PROTESTS MERRIMAN PROJECT

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Doug Livingston
December 16, 2020

Woodridge Local Schools, a Cuyahoga Falls councilman, an environmental attorney and citizens concerned about racial and economic fairness are joining a group of local residents and business owners protesting new high-end, tax-abated townhomes in the Merriman Valley.

The debate involves Petros Development Group asking City Council to approve a conditional rezoning of the former Riverwoods Golf Course at 1870 Akron-Peninsula Road for 197 new townhomes, including 28 that would be owner-occupied. After months of consultation with the city of Akron, which supports the plan for new housing, the Cleveland-based developer has purchased additional acreage lining the Cuyahoga River for conservation and public access.

About 45 of the 76 acres on the entire lot would be donated to the West Creek Conservancy, a nonprofit that works with private developers to steward protected land. Akron City Council heard more than three hours of testimony, mostly in opposition, before deciding Monday to wait until they meet again Jan. 4 to vote on the initial conditional use permit.

Critics of the housing project slammed the city of Akron for giving 15-year tax breaks to a developer who plans to charge \$1,500 a month to rent a townhome. The city took offense to the notion that the project would push costs onto less fortunate corners of the city where there's been less interest in the new tax incentive for builders, including poorer neighborhoods with more Black residents.

"I reject, and it's hurtful, that the folks who worked so hard, many of you on council worked so hard with us in (the Office of Integrated Development) to improve the business conditions, to improve the housing conditions, we are doing just that. We are very proud of it," said Deputy Mayor **James Hardy** after listening to more than an hour of public testimony blasting the project as a subsidy for wealthy housing in a city where most people couldn't afford it.

"I don't want us to get on this bandwagon that somehow the tax abatement policy, in particular, is inequitable," said Hardy, explaining that without the tax abatements, there would be no investment to debate.

"Suburban communities all around us build new housing on a continual basis, yet we in Akron are expected to sit back and not compete," added Jason Segedy, the city's director of Planning and Urban Development.

"Will everyone here show up at the Hudson or the Green or the Medina County planning commission the next time an investment there sucks people and jobs out of Akron?" he asked critics, who have collected more than 10,000 signatures online in opposition to new housing at a wooded city lot on nearby Theiss Road. The city will sell the Theiss Road lot for conservation or to a developer with plans to build between 60 and 110 single family homes, with the most expensive models priced at \$420,000.

"Residential development finally happens in Akron, and I will remind everyone that this is in Akron," Segedy said. "For the first time in generations after we've lost 1/3 of our population and our residents have been deprived of home equity, jobs and retail opportunities and seen disinvestment and decline, and people throw out every excuse they can think of to stop it."

Akron Council approved Mayor Dan Horrigan's 15-year tax abatement on new residential construction in 2017. Since then, Hardy said residential construction permits have soared from seven to 1,200, with many permits pulled by developers of subdivisions eyeing up the last open lots in Akron. A Beacon Journal and Devil Strip analysis of abatement applicants found that interest in the new tax breaks has been clustered in Akron's more affluent ward 8, which includes the Merriman Valley.

New homes or apartments at the privately owned Riverwoods Golf Course or the city-owned Theiss Road lot would be exempt from property taxes on all but the land for 15 years. Children living in the new housing units would attend Woodridge Local Schools, which like all public schools in Ohio depends heavily on property taxes.

"Many of your resident children are Woodridge Bulldogs," Walter Davis, superintendent of Woodridge Local Schools, told Akron Council Monday. "When the city of Akron seeks to grow population through residential development using schemes that offer developers and businesses tax abatements, the Woodridge local school district loses. With no say in the matter, our board (of education) is assuming the responsibility of the education of Akron resident children without tax support for the term of the 15-year abatement."

Residents of Peninsula, Cuyahoga Falls and other communities served by Woodridge must "underwrite the cost" of educating families in new Akron housing, said Davis, who joined Cuyahoga Falls Councilman Frank Stams of Ward 8 in urging no new housing until a master development plan is completed for the Merriman Valley.

"We believe that we will create income tax through the people who live there and pay it," Sam Petros said of his company's proposal \$40 million plan for townhomes using Medina-based Pride One as the project manager. "We're going to create taxes through our own building and investment in it. Fifteen years from now, it's probably going to be worth \$60 million and it's going to pay full taxes to Akron and to the schools and to everyone for the rest of its existence, which should be hundreds of years."

Petros stressed that the new roads and sidewalks in the development would be private with no plowing or maintenance required from the city.

Emily Collins, an environmental attorney at Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services, said Akron code requires that any conditional use "will not be detrimental to the economic welfare of the community

and will not result in the destruction, loss or damage of a natural, scenic or historic feature of major importance."

She added that development documents provided to the public do not "give me the ability to critique" the stormwater management process plan for the proposed townhomes. "Instead, the proposed ordinance kicks the can down the road so that detailed plans will be provided after the petition is approved and after public participation opportunities are largely eliminated," Collins said.

Along with Petros, briefing council on the project were Greg Modic, president of Land Development at Petros Development Group, Derrick Schafer with West Creek Conservancy and Greg Snowden, senior biologist with Davey Resource Group out of Kent.

The additional acreage along the water's edge would be donated and preserved by West Creek, which previously worked with 26 partners to designate the Cuyahoga River a public water trail.

"We've worked diligently to protect areas throughout Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, including sections of Mud Brook and Woodward Creek (in the Merriman Valley)," said Schafer. "And those were done in partnership with not only the city of Akron but private developers as well."

The housing development would include space for a kayak/canoe launch, a public trail and a bridge heading north across the river. Attendees of the public meeting criticized these amenities for not connecting to existing public trail system and lacking a specified funding source.

Snowden, a professional wetland scientist born and raised in the Merriman Valley, talked about the 50-year "rebirth" of the Cuyahoga River, from catching **fire** to being named "River of the Year" by American Rivers in 2019.

"The Riverwoods development really does present a great opportunity to further improve the health of the river," Snowden said.

Petros dismissed the environmental criticisms of the project, which promises 43 acres of golf course land to be returned to nature. "Environmentally, if 73% green space and a conservation group isn't the way to do this, I don't know what is," Petros said. "I mean, we should be the poster boy for future development in my opinion."

"This is way too many housing units in this limited space," said Stewart Buchanan, who owns property adjacent to the golf course on Akron-Peninsula Road. "It doesn't make sense to put housing right next to my property line, which is commercial use property."

Beth Vild, COO and director of programming at Big Love Network, an environmental health equity agency, called the Riverwoods development "wealth subsidized housing."

"I would like to question the strategy of urban sprawl that is being presented here for a higher income neighborhood when we are currently in the process, through the mayor's office, at looking at racial equity issues throughout our city," she said.

Vild pointed to evictions in Akron that align with historic redlining maps. She cautioned against allowing more investment in affluent areas using tax breaks while residents in Akron's struggling housing markets continue to pay the same tax rates.

Chris Harvey, a Black man who lives in Goodyear Heights, questioned the racial equity of the development.

"As a resident, as a person of color, none of this sounds equitable," he said. "It sounds like more of the same ... A lot of the new developments for people who are Black who live around the city, none of this is really equitable for us and none of it is really advertised for us."

Reach Beacon Journal reporter Doug Livingston at dlivingston@thebeaconjournal.com or 330-996-3792.

"Suburban communities all around us build new housing on a continual basis, yet we in Akron are expected to sit back and not compete."

AKRON-AREA LEADERS AND RESIDENTS WEDNESDAY LIT UP TWITTER

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Amanda Garrett
August 20, 2020

Akron-area leaders and residents Wednesday lit up Twitter responding to President Donald Trump's tweet urging people to stop buying Goodyear tires.

Trump lashed out against the tire maker — with headquarters in Akron — after a local TV news station in Kansas reported that Goodyear banned workplace political campaigning for any parties or candidates. According to the report, the ban extended to Trump's Make America Great Again slogan, which is often emblazoned on hats.

The same news story noted that Goodyear is allowing its associates to express support for issues involving racial injustice and equity issues, like LGBTQ rights.

On Wednesday, following the president's tweet, Goodyear said a slide shown in the Kansas television news report was not from or distributed by the corporation and was not part of employee training.

"To be clear on our longstanding corporate policy, Goodyear has zero tolerance for any forms of harassment or discrimination," Goodyear tweeted. "To enable a work environment free of those, we ask that associates refrain from workplace expressions in support of political campaigning for any candidate or political party, as well as similar forms of advocacy that fall outside the scope of racial justice and equity issues."

Some Akronites on Wednesday morning used Twitter to defend Goodyear, many even before Goodyear publicly began to defend itself.

James Hardy, Akron's deputy mayor for integrated development, said he was "beyond proud" that Goodyear was in Akron, his hometown.

"They care about our community, and stayed put when so many companies did not," Hardy tweeted. "We are the #RubberCity Mr. President. And we stick together."

The city of Akron also used its verified Twitter account @AkronOhioMayor to defend Goodyear, tweeting: "Goodyear has believed in this community for generations, investing in the power, tenacity and honest people of the heartland, which is more than we can say for this president. #WeStandWithGoodyear"

The city's tweet in response to Trump's tweet was even more direct, complete with a meme of Akron native NBA superstar LeBron James donning a judge's wig and wagging his finger in disapproval: "First,

you came to destroy American decency. Next, you came to destroy American institutions. Now you're coming to destroy the American economy and heartland jobs. Luckily, you seem to fail at everything you do."

Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan is a Democrat.

The Akron-Summit County Public Library remained neutral on Twitter, but did remind its 6,972 Twitter followers that the city of Akron is soon installing a rubber worker statue by sculptor Alan Cottrill on the new downtown roundabout.

"This project celebrates the remarkable people that distinguished Akron as the Rubber Capital of the World," the library's tweet said.

And at least one Goodyear defender on Twitter suggested the company's iconic airship join the political battle.

@drownedworld tweeted, "The blimp should be deployed to DC."

CITY BUYS APP DESIGNED TO SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES ISRAELI COMPANY WAS PAID \$32,500 FOR PURCHASE PLAIN DEALER

Robin Goist

August 14, 2020

The City of Akron paid \$32,500 for foreign-based company to develop a mobile app that offers incentives for residents to support local businesses during the coronavirus pandemic.

The city has set aside an additional \$40,000 to reimburse businesses for discounts that will be given to app users under what is being called a “blimp” point system, a city spokeswoman said Thursday.

Cleveland.com asked for the cost of the app program, which the city announced Monday without providing details about expenses, and inquired why the city paid a foreign firm to design the app rather than a local software designer. The free Akronite app was designed by Colu, which is based in Israel and gained international attention in December 2019 for an app that helped boost businesses in Tel Aviv’s Jaffa district at a time when light-rail construction made the area harder to access.

Akron is the first American city that has partnered with Colu, according to TechCrunch.

The Akronite project was overseen by Deputy Mayor **James Hardy** and Akron’s Office of Integrated Development.

Asked by cleveland.com about the decision to partner with Colu, Hardy said the city wanted to act swiftly and procure an “off-the-shelf” product, rather than pursue developing an app from scratch.

Here is part of Hardy’s statement:

“Given the urgency of COVID-19 and the policy drive to respond both creatively and swiftly to support the Akron economy, and particularly our small businesses, the City sought an ‘off the shelf’ product that could go to market quickly. While we certainly engaged our local startup community, we determined there wasn’t a local option available that could respond to the urgency called for in this pandemic. This is in no way a criticism of the abilities, ingenuity, or quality of Akron entrepreneurs, or their vast tech offerings. If circumstances had been different, and speed wasn’t such an important factor, we could have entertained the possibility of building a product from scratch in partnership with a local startup.”

AKRON SET TO LAUNCH NEW APP TO BOOST SMALL BUSINESSES & CIVIC PRIDE

WKYC STUDIOS

Lynna Lai

June 19, 2020

Akron, known as the Rubber City, is hoping a new app will help its small business economy bounce back from the downturn of the coronavirus pandemic.

The city is partnering with Israeli-based Colu Technologies to develop an app-based reward program to incentivize buying local.

"My team and I challenged ourselves to think outside the box," said James Hardy, Akron Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development. He explained that many people want to shop at local businesses, but it's often difficult to figure out which stores to patronize.

"We had consumers, for the first time, not knowing how to safely access them, and patron those businesses, and could they help," he said.

The "Akronite" app is set to launch in July, and will showcase local businesses along with the stories of the people who own them. There will be a special emphasis on minority-owned businesses.

"The idea, it's amazing!" exclaimed Takila Nuss, owner of Essential Dipped Delights in Akron's Northside District near downtown. The African-American single mother is a former restaurant server, who became an entrepreneur so that her two children will learn from her work ethic.

"Basically, I started my business to teach my children how to work hard," she said. "I've been working since I was 14."

Michael Mazur, Colu's Vice-President of Business Development, believes knowing the stories of business owners will foster an emotional bond with customers (unlike with big-box stores) and potentially change consumer behavior.

"We believe that people are much more inclined to shop at local businesses if they know, 'Who are the business owners, and who are they behind the counter?'" Mazur said.

Users of the app who patronize local businesses are rewarded for their civic pride with "currency" appropriately called "blimps." The blimps act as reward dollars and discounts that can be used at participating stores.

Colu chose Akron to launch its business efforts in the U.S. The city is spending \$60,000 to launch the app and support the rewards program.

The app will be available on both iOS and Android by the end of July.

AKRON SETS 'FRAMEWORK' TO IMPROVE, GROW CITY IN FIVE YEARS

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Jim Mackinnon
December 3, 2019

Akron on Monday unveiled a strategic plan aimed at helping the city grow and thrive in upcoming years.

The Five-Year Strategic Framework will help the city better focus its resources and relationships, advance equitable outcomes and deliver improved services for all Akron residents, the city said in a news release.

The plan is part of the new Office of Integrated Development, or OID, headed by Deputy Mayor **James Hardy**.

The plan does not call for tax increases.

The plan's progress will be tracked using economic and social indicators; the indicators will be reported annually.

"OID is not about doing something different for difference's sake. It's about working smarter together to build and sustain an Akron that is healthy, equitable, beautiful, and resilient," Mayor Dan Horrigan said in a prepared statement. "Vision-driven, community-focused development is not just the right thing to do, it's also good business. My hope in the coming years, as we take this more inclusive approach to development, is that our residents find increased economic opportunity for themselves and their families and an overall improved quality of life."

Hardy called the five-year strategy plan ambitious but also aligned with ongoing goals and programs.

"Everything that is contemplated will be completed or underway by 2024," Hardy said.

The report includes a timeline for completing several major downtown projects:

- The Main Street promenade project by the end of 2020.
- The Bowery redevelopment by the end of 2019/early 2020.
- Redevelopment of the former Cascade Hotel by the end of 2020.
- The Law Building redevelopment by the end of 2020.
- The CitiCenter redevelopment by the end of 2021.
- The Mayflower building renovations by the end of 2021.

The Office of Integrated Development is responsible for business attraction and retention, entrepreneurship, downtown development, recreation and public space, land use and zoning, as well as long-range planning and city real estate. The office will build on existing strategies that include Elevate Greater Akron, the Downtown Vision and Redevelopment Plan, and Planning to Grow Akron.

“I think the biggest question is, why will this be bigger and better?” Hardy said.

That’s largely because of two reasons, he said.

First, the plan calls for becoming better stewards of existing resources and looking at becoming more efficient and effective, he said.

Secondly, the strategy involves implementing the Elevate Greater Akron and Reimagining the Civic Commons initiatives and reintegrating community and economic development planning, he said.

While developers of the strategy looked at what other cities, particularly Detroit, are doing to address similar legacy economic and community issues, this plan is not a cut-and-paste of those other efforts, Hardy said.

“It is authentically Akron,” he said.

The five-year framework was developed over the course of more than a year of planning, with the Office of Integrated Development created and launched in part by a \$139,020 grant from the John S. and James L Knight Foundation.

“This process and the resulting OID Five-Year Strategic Framework were born, in part, out of our local experience with Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative,” said Knight Foundation Akron Director Kyle Kutuchief. “The implementation of this plan is an extension of that new way of working focused on co-design, co-creation and co-stewardship.”

The 61-page document can be found online at www.akronohio.gov/OID.

AKRON STREAMLINES CITY DEPARTMENTS INTO NEW OFFICE OF INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Dan Shingler
December 1, 2019

James Hardy now officially has his work cut out for him.

Hardy, chief of staff to Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan, was named deputy mayor in charge of the city's new Office of Integrated Development (OID) in July. Now he's got an actual office to run, with goals to achieve.

The city said it will announce on Monday, Dec. 2, that it has combined the functions of planning and urban development, economic opportunity, public life, development, administrative support and development engineering under Hardy in the new OID, along with goals for the office. Many of those functions, such as planning, engineering and development, previously ran as their own departments but will now function as city divisions, Hardy said.

Annie McFadden will succeed Hardy as the mayor's chief of staff. McFadden has served as deputy chief of staff since 2016.

With the OID, the city is seeking to streamline its operations and make them more responsive to its residents' needs. The city modeled its new office after similar efforts it studied in other communities in order to find the best practices it could adopt for Akron.

"We looked at Detroit, Lansing (Mich.), Louisville (Ky.) and Minneapolis, but if I had to point to one it would be Detroit," Hardy said. "It's bigger than Akron, but in terms of their everyday issues, whether it's vacant housing or economic inequities along racial lines in particular or it's legacy government that hasn't changed in a long time ... there are a lot of similarities with Akron, just at a bigger scale."

Like Akron, Detroit has had to contend with a shrinking population. As a result, it has fewer staff members to take care of a city that, geographically at least, is the same size as always.

In Akron, much of the city's administrative structure had not been changed in years, decades or even longer. The city's last comprehensive plan was done in 1919, Hardy noted. The new changes are designed to eliminate redundancies and seek efficiencies.

Hardy pointed out that Akron's economic development department shrank from 21 employees before the 2008 recession to only six when the city announced formation of the OID in February. The planning department had dozens of employees in the 1980s and '90s, but only about 17 today. Functions need to be combined for things to get done, he said.

"For instance, Lock 3 and downtown were separate from recreation and parks, but classified the same. ... Now that they're unified, a lot of issues go away and we can start to program people to work at Lock 3 or at a community center event from the same staff. There doesn't need to be this specialization anymore — and there can't be," Hardy said.

The moves are also meant to make life easier for businesses, which will be able to deal with fewer people to accomplish what they need to with divisions such as engineering or planning, Hardy said.

"There is no (developer's) plan that only touches zoning and not engineering, or that touches the building department and doesn't touch zoning. ... Now that we're making a more customer-friendly environment, I think we'll have better success," he said.

But the city also is determined to use its new structure to put the needs of its residents on equal footing with the needs of businesses or anyone else, with a focus on making Akron's neighborhoods safer, more livable and hopefully more populated.

"We're going to look as much at how a project looks and is designed, and whether it's fair and equitable, as much as we look at how much we can do for the business," Hardy said.

Hardy and Horrigan said they hope the new structure will help the city capitalize on an abatement being offered for residential development by making it easier for such projects to be approved. The OID has a broad swath of new goals, from furthering downtown development to addressing racial income inequities and getting minorities more involved in city leadership.

"I think, obviously, implementing the downtown redevelopment plan is alive and well," Hardy said.

"When you look at downtown, we are cooking with gas in terms of making a destination out of our downtown. Other things, like expanding economic opportunity in the city, are going to take more time."

The city also should be better able to work with Summit County and the Greater Akron Chamber on the three entities' Elevate Greater Akron initiative. That project aims to grow the local economy and drive economic opportunity by promoting inclusion, workforce development, middle- market business growth and development downtown and at other Akron job hubs.

Summit County executive Ilene Shapiro said she supports the city's moves with the new office.

"We at the county also adjusted some time ago and there were some modifications at the chamber. With some modifications at the city, now I think it will be very beneficial to our community as a whole," Shapiro said. "You have to have the teams working together. Not only from the county to the city to the chamber ... but inside each organization as well."

Hardy said the city's reorganization plan got little pushback and that every employee at affected functions, "from secretaries to department heads," was involved in the effort.

Going forward, Akron likely will have to address its zoning and create a new comprehensive plan, he added.

But those efforts will likely take at least five years and "many, many meetings" to complete, and Hardy said he doesn't anticipate beginning such efforts until 2023.



Deputy Mayor For Integrated Development, James Hardy, Named A 2019 Crain's Cleveland Business "Forty Under 40" Honoree



City of Akron Press Release

From the desk of Ellen Lander Nischt

Published: 11-19-2019

Akron, Ohio, November 19, 2019 – Mayor Dan Horrigan is proud to congratulate Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development, James Hardy, on a well-deserved regional award. James is being honored by *Crain's Cleveland Business* "Forty under 40" as an outstanding leader in the field of public service. *Crain's Cleveland Business* honors 40 of the community's best and brightest under the age of 40 each year. Deputy Mayor Hardy is being recognized for his unwavering commitment to public service and the Akron community.

"As Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development, James has devoted himself to improving the way we do business as a City, by working to integrate functions, streamline operations, and focus on equitable outcomes," Mayor Dan Horrigan said. "This is a well-deserved recognition of his contributions to Akron and his value as a leader who truly cares about his work and community."

In his role as the City's first Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development, James oversees the Office of Integrated Development (OID). OID houses the functions of Planning, Development, Business Retention and Expansion, Development Engineering, and Public Life, including recreation and downtown operations. James brings a long history of public service to the position, including prior work as a Regional Director for Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, an Executive Office Intern for Former U.S. President Bill Clinton, and six years on Akron Public Schools Board of Education. Immediately prior to joining Mayor Horrigan's administration, Hardy served as Assistant Director of Community Health at Summit County Public Health, where he led the Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit.

Deputy Mayor Hardy holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science-Criminal Justice from the University of Akron, and a Master's Degree in Public Health from Kent State University with a concentration in Health Policy and Management. A lifelong resident of Akron, he is also involved in various community organizations including service on the board of Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative (CANAPI) and the Akron Civic Theater. James is a graduate of Leadership Akron Class 34. He is also a proud husband and father of two.

For more information on Deputy Mayor Hardy and the *Crain's Cleveland Business* "Forty under 40" award please read: <https://www.crainscleveland.com/awards/james-hardy-forty-under-40-2019>.

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AKRON'S JAMES HARDY: MORE ACTION, LESS TALK WILL GET STUFF DONE

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Dan Shingler
September 30, 2018

Sometimes, it takes a bold, if obvious, idea.

Like, "Getting shit done."

That one's from one of Akron's young civic leaders and rising political stars: James Hardy, chief of staff to Mayor Dan Horrigan. Hardy activated muscles around eyebrows and ears in Cleveland last month when he made that the title of a talk he gave to the startup investment and support group Flashstarts' Pitch NEON event.

He quickly became the region's "Who is this guy?" after *Scene* magazine and others reported on his talk, which Hardy titled "G.S.D." and which hammered on the need for more action and less talk by civic leaders.

"I find this hilarious," Hardy said of the reaction he has received, talking to *Crain's* from his "second office" at the Lockview restaurant in downtown Akron.

Hardy said it wasn't his intent to shame anyone or even to tell anyone what to do. But when he was asked to give a talk explaining to Clevelanders how Akron has gotten a burst of energy and development lately, he only knew how to be his plain-spoken self.

"I was a fill-in for the mayor, because they originally wanted the mayor to do a speech, and he honestly couldn't," Hardy said over chips and Lawson's dip at the Lockview.

"I was struggling (with a topic) ... and basically the direction I got was, 'We're really excited about the stuff we hear and want to hear more about it. If you could shed some light on what you think is creating all this buzz and stir in Akron, that would be beneficial.' "

So, Hardy boiled it down for them — stop talking, start doing. That's Akron's not-so-secret strategy.

"My main message was it's really this whole movement from collaboration, which I would say is just sort of meeting and talking about things, and moving to coordination, which is sharing budgets and sharing resources," Hardy said.

He put it this way for his Cleveland audience:

"Collaboration is the state of having shared interests and efforts. Boy, that sounds wonderful, doesn't it? If only we had shared interests and efforts, everything would be fine, right? I can't go to one more

meeting — and we've been trying to stop them in Akron — where we talk about collaborating. We're moving to a different model now: coordination."

Coordination is different and more effective, Hardy maintained, because it requires actual effort and even sometimes sacrifice.

He touts efforts among Akron, Summit County and others in and around the city, where coordinating entities actually combine their budgets and resources to accomplish things they agree are for the greater good. That includes a current effort by the city, county and the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce to produce an economic study and a shared strategic plan. It also includes Akron's Civic Commons project, he said, which has a plethora of groups combining efforts to create a 3-mile corridor connecting downtown Akron and its amenities with Summit Lake Park and neighborhoods in between.

As for his delivery, Hardy said he was indeed hoping to be a little provocative with his language. He was paraphrasing a *Philadelphia Inquirer* piece about cities getting "stuff" done. But he said he's not gotten any pushback from anyone at the city of Akron, including his boss.

"I think he would wholeheartedly agree. ... I believe that because he believes it," Hardy said of Horrigan.

The mayor said he was not only on board with the message, but that he has hired millennial staffers, including Hardy, in part because they are impatient and eager for action.

"I'm perfectly fine with it ... His comments weren't meant in any negative way. It's just, 'Let's get some stuff done,' " Horrigan said. "A little bit of impatience is not bad. We need a little impatience to get stuff done sometimes."

Horrigan's administration is marked by a change from past practices in Akron. The mayor is focused on urban living downtown and making other neighborhoods in the city more livable and pedestrian-friendly, all while trying to rebuild the city's population.

Horrigan needs change agents, and Hardy seems to have been born to be one.

Hardy said he has wanted a political career since he was a kid growing up in West Akron with then-Akron chief of staff Joel Bailey as his neighbor. Hardy, whose parents were both school administrators, wanted to affect change and saw Bailey's world as his means to do it.

"I went to Joel and said, 'I want to get involved in politics like you. How do I do it?' He said, 'You should call up your ward councilperson, who's running.' He put me in touch with Dan (Horrigan), and that's how we first met," Hardy recalled.

Bailey remains a mentor and guidepost, as does former Akron chief of staff David Lieberth, whom Hardy also routinely turns to for advice, he said.

Hardy already has a varied background. In addition to a bachelor's degree from UA in political science, he earned a master's degree from Kent State University in public health — he said he's constantly concerned with providing a healthy place for people to live. He has helped Horrigan on city council and

mayoral campaigns and was a special assistant to the president and board of trustees at Kent State. All of those things prepared him for his current role, he said.

Bailey and Lieberth said they're continually impressed by Hardy's drive, abilities and interest in their sport.

"He was always interested in politics. He ran for the school board at like 21 — and won," Bailey said.

Bailey also recalled an even younger Hardy, dating back to when he moved next door and Hardy was only 6.

"He was the little red-headed kid next door, and his father was the (interim) superintendent of Akron schools ... He would come over many days after school and just watch TV or whatever," Bailey said.

"Now I think he probably soaked up more than we realized when his father and I would talk."

Lieberth, who has only known Hardy since he was in college at the University of Akron, said he has been impressed with many things the young civic leader has done — but taking over as chief of staff at 31 is at the top of his list.

"When I did it, I was much older. I had already spent 10 years as a reporter and 25 years as a lawyer," Lieberth said.

He describes the job of chief of staff as "swimming through peanut butter," or "being in a batting cage — but without a bat."

He said it takes a deft touch, but it's also a job where you can turn the right ideas into reality, he said.

"Part of the art of being chief of staff is figuring out how to make the system work for you and the people you want to help. ... And by and large, James has done that ... but the one quality I would assign to him that is critical in that job, but lacking in so many other people, is imagination," Lieberth said.

Lieberth and Bailey also have something else in common — a belief that Hardy will, if he wants to, hold a higher elected office himself at some point.

Hardy said he's not sure if he'll do that or not. He has run for the Akron Public Schools board and won, but lost a bid for Akron City Council.

He now he thinks he "may have gotten the better end of the deal" by losing that election, because he can now focus on getting stuff done rather than things like campaigning and raising election funds.

Bailey thinks he should run someday.

"You end up doing a lot of that stuff anyway (as chief of staff), so at some point you may as well be the elected official," Bailey said. "I hope he chooses to run, because he has a lot to offer. ... He would be wonderful in an elected office."

Even Horrigan, who is not eager to lose his valued chief of staff, thinks Hardy would be a good candidate.

"It's always impossible to tell what the future holds. ... But James' future is very bright, and it's kind of just what he wants to do. It's all about how you want to manage your time, your life and your family. ... But I have no doubt he'll be successful in whatever he does," Horrigan said.

AKRON'S CHIEF OF STAFF TELLS CLEVELAND LEADERS TO 'GET YOUR SHIT DONE' AT FLASHSTARTS EVENT

CLEVELAND SCENE

Sam Allard
September 11, 2018

Clevelanders need not look longingly to the coasts for dynamic civic leadership. Indeed, just forty minutes south, a new cadre of Akron leaders are shaking up the city and pitching old-school leadership to solve new problems.

"The disruptive innovation that needs to take place in Northeast Ohio," said James Hardy, Akron's Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff, "is common sense. It's as simple as checking one's ego at the door and recognizing that we're not going to solve infant mortality with an app. We're not going to solve economic despair with some sort of innovation that comes out of anywhere but the systems that created it. We have to change the systems, radically, if we want to see innovation."

Hardy spoke as part of the Flashstarts "Pitch NEON" event Monday night, a Tedx-style series of presentations featuring local start-ups and innovators in the civic and corporate spheres. Both Bernie Moreno and Jon Pinney were on the roster, speaking about the Blockland initiative. MetroHealth's CEO Dr. Akram Boutros presented too. He was the only speaker without an accompanying PowerPoint and spoke, unexpectedly, about the innovation on display at the Bernie Moreno Companies. The Urban League of Greater Cleveland's Marsha Mockabee and Kent State University President Beverly Warren were among the other high-profile presenters.

A few of the early-stage companies that have participated in the FlashStarts accelerator — Vlipsy, Hedgemon and Unbox the Dress — gave slick presentations that showed real promise and potentially game-changing innovations in their respective fields.

But the star of the evening — from Scene's perspective — was Hardy, who admitted that he could barely use his cell phone but stressed that civic innovation generally isn't about technology.

"I always hear that tech can solve 90 percent of my problems. An app will solve 90 percent of Akron's problems," he joked. "But when I see cities innovating in the modern economy, it's more like 10 percent. The other 90 percent is getting your shit done."

(The title of Hardy's presentation was "G.S.D.," i.e., Getting Shit Done.)

He cited a recent editorial in the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, which suggested — his paraphrasing — that "one

of the most subversive and innovative things cities can do is maintain their shit."

He offered the Akron Civic Commons project as evidence, an example of multiple public agencies sharing their budgets and strategizing how to spend effectively with public input.

"There's this obsession with collaboration," Hardy said, admitting he's grown weary of Summit County leaders touting how well they collaborate. An identical situation exists in Cuyahoga County. Leaders love celebrating the region's collaborative spirit, despite the dismal outcomes their collaborations have produced. ("Rhapsodizing about public private partnerships," we wrote this summer, "is more or less [the Greater Cleveland Partnership's] posture in repose.")

"It sounds wonderful, doesn't it?" Hardy said. "If only we had shared interests and efforts, everything would be fine!"

But he said collaboration wasn't enough. For cities to succeed, they must move from collaboration to *coordination*, not just sharing interests but organizing people and groups so that they actually work together.

Brad Whitehead, the President of the local Fund for our Economic Future, was on to something similar when he opined in the Plain Dealer in July that what the region needed, more than new big ideas, was "greater civic alignment and commitment to implementation at scale."

Hardy said that Akron's recent systemic changes have been spurred by "once-in-a-generation" shifts in regional leadership. There is now a new mayor, a new Summit County Executive and a new president of the local chamber of commerce.

Under this new triumvirate, Akron has completed a joint strategic plan across all three entities that "deduplicates, strategizes how we're going to deploy our funds so that no one spends money that somebody else is spending, and reorganizes ourselves to focus on local growth — innovation and entrepreneurship — in an inclusive economy."

Just being willing to be transparent about one's budget and coordinating with other agencies' budgets, Hardy said, has been pretty transformative.

Lastly, Hardy suggested that the region should dispense with its "ridiculous notion" that each city in the region is its own entity that competes with its neighbors.

"No one else does this," he said. "We've got to get over this generational bull that says that whatever happens in Cleveland can't happen in Akron and whatever happens in Akron can't happen in Cleveland and oh, by the way, at least we're not Youngstown. That's never going to build this region. We're in it together."

It was a Ted-style talk, and Hardy offered a slam-dunk conclusion that we won't try to improve

upon. "We've seen a lot of apps today, and that's wonderful," he said. "But in the civic space, nothing replaces systemic change that's aligned, coordinated and focused on real people solving real problems."

RUBBER CITY RISING; 'UNPRECEDENTED' DEVELOPMENT IS HELPING TO RESHAPE DOWNTOWN AKRON

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Dan Shingler
July 16, 2018

In Akron these days, it seems you can't wave a loan application or a for-sale sign without a developer tackling you, pen and grand plans in hand.

The Rubber City is being vulcanized - Akron's downtown core is on **fire** with a slew of recent developments, bigger ones in the works and seemingly no end to new projects for which developers are already buying property.

The Bowery Project, the Law Building, the City Center Hotel and a yet-to-be unveiled project near Lock 3 that could be the biggest project yet have area developers busy.

How active is it?

"On a scale of one to 10? It depends on how you quantify the scale, but from Akron's standpoint, it's a 10 if you look at the development timeline and compare the activity now with what has happened over time. Just in the housing sector alone, it's unprecedented, the amount of activity going on now," developer Joel Testa, president of Testa Cos., said.

He's no noob, either. His family's company has been developing in and around downtown for 40 years, and Testa helped lead downtown's current residential revival when he built the Northside Lofts in 2006 and gave the city some of its first upscale downtown housing since the advent of radial tires. Testa Cos. spent about \$30 million on the lofts' 92 units, which remain some of the city's premier housing. The building now is housing new retail development, too.

And in 2016, Testa opened the Courtyard Akron Downtown - a \$25 million, 146-room hotel that was the first to open downtown since the city's heyday.

Today's star of the stage, though, is the Bowery Project - six old, vacant, multistory buildings along South Main Street that, for more than a decade, have been a thorn bleeding momentum from downtown planners, mayors, civic boosters and previous developers who have failed to pull off a renovation.

Now it's again the jewel of the city's downtown economic revitalization efforts.

If it goes well, developers say, it will trigger a wave of additional projects, make it easier to finance other developments by inspiring investors, and give downtown the critical mass and population it needs to succeed as the urban community many hope to see.

No pressure, right?

The man taking much of that pressure, and still grinning, is Canton developer Dan DeHoff. He and his right arm, vice president of commercial development Beth Borda, say they're confident they'll announce the project's final financing soon, after many hurdles.

"The project was at risk," said DeHoff, whose DeHoff Development Co. and Fairlawn-based Welty Building Co. make up the Bowery Development Group, which is financing the about \$40 million project.

DeHoff was referring to the project's ability to use New Market and Historic Tax Credits, which he and Borda said were key to financing the project. Previous developers had some, but lost them - something DeHoff said his company discovered only after they bought into the project. But DeHoff, his partners and local officials were able to largely replace the credits and raise other financing with the help of city and state officials, which took more time, but eventually worked.

"We were going to close (on financing) in March. We're now shooting for August. A lot of that had to do with the New Market Tax Credits," Borda said.

Construction is slated to start in September, the executives said.

"Construction will take a year to 14 months, and everything will be reconstructed," Borda said.

What will be left, according to the Bowery's plans, will be a complex brought back to life, connected below ground and surrounded by new streetscaping and canal-front open spaces. It will include about 100 new apartments and 60,000 square feet of mixed-use space that is expected to include cafes, retailers, coffee shops and, according to DeHoff, a grocery store and probably a brewery with which he's currently negotiating.

But it's what's on the outside that might have the biggest impact on downtown Akron.

The project's walk-through amenities on the ground floor and its design are meant to tie that section of Main Street with a scenic and tumbling part of the Ohio & Erie Canal behind it, creating a river-walk environment with large patio area that will open access to Lock 4 and tie the canal into an increasingly walkable downtown.

Opening up such public spaces is something many civic leaders say helped downtown tremendously at neighboring Lock 3, where the city purchased a group of old buildings, tore them down and exposed a parcel that has become a major downtown park, gathering place and entertainment venue.

"It was an abomination before that," said Suzie Graham, president of the Downtown Akron Partnership.

She puts the repurposing of that site at the top of her list of changes that have transformed the downtown area, and others agree.

"Lock 3 is our Central Park. It's your recreation space, our green space and our community-event space," Testa said.

One busy street

The Bowery, though, is far from the only thing going on in that little pocket of the city.

Across the street, the Law Building's new owner, New Jersey developer Tom Rybak, just announced he's converting the 11-story office building into a mixed-use development that will include 112 luxury apartments. The \$26 million development will offer tenants on-site services for laundry and food delivery, and will have a gym and maybe even its own doorman, Rybak said.

Next door to the Bowery, the Akron Civic Theatre - which has been holding down the fort in this section of Main Street with the enduring dedication of executive director Howard Parr - is raising \$1.6 million for a lobby restoration. That would largely complete the renovation of the theater's interior, leaving only the replacement of facade before it would return to its past glory, according to Graham.

"He's so close - so close!" she said of Parr, whom she described as a local hero of many downtown boosters, herself included.

Also a few blocks north of the Bowery Project is Mayflower Manor, a 16-story building that was once a premiere downtown hotel and ballroom that currently provides subsidized low-income housing in its more than 200 apartments. New York-based Capital Realty Group announced it was purchasing the building in March. The group says it plans to spend \$10 million renovating the structure, using the city's new residential tax abatement to help.

A specialist in subsidized housing for seniors, Capital Realty reportedly has promised that residents will not have to move from the building during renovations and will be able to remain after the work is done with no increase to their rent.

City officials, who have been touting downtown as a place for residents of all incomes and walks of life, say the project is proceeding on schedule, with planning to continue through this year followed by construction in 2019.

And in the middle of all of this development, the city is redoing Main Street itself.

In March, the city announced it had been awarded an \$8 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to continue the southward march of its ongoing Main Street renovations - right past the Bowery, Civic and Law Building (so far). That's in addition to the \$5 million TIGER grant it received for the project in 2016.

It will be two years of work and traffic rerouting, but the \$26.7 million project is expected to be done at the same time as the Bowery Project. When it's done, a large section of Main Street will not only have new pathing, but new bike and walkways, transit facilities, lighting and landscaping.

City planners and downtown advocates hope all of this development on Akron's welcome mat will spur more improvements right there on the front stoop.

And that might already be happening.

Testa said he's agreed to purchase land from the city along Lock 3 on the other side of the canal, off Water Street, for a massive new building.

"We're in negotiations on a development agreement now with the city," Testa said.

He's got big plans for the site - a new building, with 172,000 square feet of space, possibly complete with a new major downtown employer that would occupy a now-vacant lot.

Testa said he has commitments from office tenants to occupy more than half of the building, with most of it going to a single out-of-state company that would be new to Akron. He's not saying who that is yet but said he's moving forward on the development.

"It's a planned entertainment complex, office building, hotel, parking garage, lofts and 10 retail/entertainment spaces all along Lock 3," Testa said.

He thinks that while there's office space in Akron, there's not really much modern office space - and not enough nice space.

Others agree. Welty CEO and former chair of the Greater Akron Chamber Don Taylor brought it up while discussing the opportunities and challenges of downtown.

"Akron's office building space is really antiquated," Taylor said. "That has hurt the Akron market because the efficiencies, and the collaborative space you could create is really antiquated."

Testa hopes he's right and that Taylor's work on the Bowery Project produces a successful stretch along Main Street and around the Civic.

"We would almost butt up against the Civic," Testa said of the new project.

More than Main Street

The Civic section of Main Street is not the only part of downtown Akron that has been experiencing a boom in development, nor is it the only section with more on the way.

Testa, for example, is adding on to his Northside Lofts on the northern edge of the city's center. That development got off to a fast start, lost some momentum during the financial crisis, but has recently been expanding with a ground-floor marketplace for new, local retailers and a planned farmers and food market on the floor below.

Now Testa plans to invest \$5 million more this year, adding new lofts.

"Northside's been a phased thing. We have another 12 units to start this fall," he said.

Along Main Street near Cascade Plaza, he's also redeveloping the former 342-room City Center Hotel - one of the city's taller buildings at 19 stories - into about 144 apartments he hopes to bring to market next year.

Over on East Market Street, between North Main and High streets, there's another pocket of development, with artistic flavor that followed the opening of the new Akron Art Museum building in 2007.

That area has been championed by developer Tony Troppe, whose projects are usually smaller than giant bites like the Bowery. But Troppe is basically trying to build a district around the arts by chewing up one piece at a time and spitting out developments known for their creative use of modern design in old spaces.

Currently, the development of a new hotel is on his plate. Troppe is converting the former United Building into a 71-room (to start) boutique hotel that he's dubbing the Blu-tique Hotel, adopting a moniker shared by his nearby Blu Jazz+ club.

Phase one of the project will cost about \$12 million, is ongoing and should be open by this Thanksgiving, Troppe said. After that, he'll expand to as many as 150 rooms, depending on demand, he said.

Troppe said he's co-developing the project with Medina-based Riley Hotel Group - which will also manage the Blu-tique, along with 17 other hotels it operates around the U.S., including the Kent State University Hotel and Conference Center.

Troppe's work at improving the neighborhood already may be helping the city to attract other developments. A 3,000-square-foot microbrewery, Akronym Brewing, opened up nearby on Market Street this spring.

Getting it to stick

It's quite a list of developments, and a long one for a city the size of Akron, which has been losing population - an issue Mayor Dan Horrigan wants to address.

And because Akron's core is small, these developments all are in close proximity to one another as well. For one, Troppe's developments and Testa's Northside Lofts are about a five-minute walk to the Bowery site.

The city has also had its fair share of false starts over the years, most recently with the financial crisis stalling some developments and the Bowery Project's recent failures to launch. But this time really does feel different, civic leaders say.

"That's always the challenge," GAR Foundation President Christine Amer Mayer said. "There's always a lot to get excited about, but how much of it actually converts to real projects? But I'm feeling really optimistic about what we're seeing now."

City officials, some of whom have been working on the current round of projects under more than one administration, also express real confidence in ongoing development.

"We're at that initial tipping point that a lot of other cities, including downtown Cleveland, have been at before," said **James Hardy**, the mayor's chief of staff.

He added, "We are about to prove the market downtown - not just for residential living, but for business and mixed-use as well. Once we do that, I think the spigot will really open up."

FORMER AKRON POLICE CHIEF SUES AKRON OVER HIS RESIGNATION; CITY DENIES ALLEGATIONS

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Stephanie Warsmith
July 10, 2018

When city officials claimed there was a recording of former Akron Police Chief James Nice making racial slurs, the recording didn't actually exist, Nice alleges in a federal lawsuit filed Tuesday against the city.

Nice points to the alleged recording as an example of how he believes city leaders defamed him and forced him to abruptly resign last August.

"No such recording exists because (Nice) never made those statements," states the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Akron.

Nice filed the lawsuit against the city of Akron, Mayor Dan Horrigan and Police Chief Kenneth Ball. He accuses the city of defamation, invasion of privacy and a violation of his due process rights and says he suffered "substantial economic, non-economic damages, permanent harm to his professional and personal reputation and mental anguish and emotional distress."

"He thinks he was wronged in a number of ways and he wants to seek justice through the legal process," said Shawn Romer, Nice's Cleveland attorney who handles civil rights matters.

Akron spokeswoman Ellen Lander Nischt released a statement Tuesday afternoon that said Nice voluntarily resigned Aug. 27 "following serious allegations that he engaged in conduct unbecoming a member of the Akron Police Department." She also said Nice ultimately pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor criminal charge.

"Throughout this period, the various allegations against James Nice caused the city of Akron and the men and women of the Akron Police Department significant unwanted disruption and embarrassment," Nischt said. "At no point did the city misrepresent any information or mislead the public in any way regarding the former chief's apparent misconduct."

Nice abruptly resigned after accusations that he used a racial slur, had a non-consensual affair with a subordinate and possibly was involved in criminal misdeeds involving his nephew's used car business. He was sentenced to probation in February after pleading guilty to misusing a law enforcement database.

At his sentencing, Nice denied the racial slur and non-consensual affair allegations and said these claims led to his "unjust" resignation from the police department and that he would "seek justice to rectify them."

Nice claims in his lawsuit that he was forced to resign because he didn't see eye-to-eye with Mayor Dan Horrigan, who was elected in November 2015. Nice was hired as chief in June 2011 by former, long-time Mayor Don Plusquellic after a national search.

Nice said in the suit that Horrigan pressured him to promote officers to high-level positions who were loyal to the mayor and attempted to exert control over the police department in other ways that Nice refused when he thought doing so would endanger residents and city visitors or threaten the department's operations.

Nice says in the suit that he expressed his concerns to members of Akron City Council, who relayed these conversations to Horrigan.

"When it became apparent to Horrigan that (Nice) would not submit to unmitigated and unconditional loyalty, Horrigan became bent on removing" Nice, the suit says.

Two days before resigning, Nice said Ball told him that Joseph Nice, Nice's nephew who then was the subject of a criminal investigation, was alleging that the then-chief had made racially derogatory comments about Charles Brown, the city's deputy mayor for public safety, who is African-American. Ball also told Nice there was a tape-recorded conversation of these remarks, according to the lawsuit.

Nice said he agreed to resign "to avoid causing embarrassment" to the police department and his family.

After Nice resigned, Horrigan, Ball and Chief of Staff James Hardy made "false allegations" against Nice at a news conference, the suit claims. The leaders also spearheaded a "bogus" criminal investigation against Nice, the suit alleges.

Nice said he pleaded guilty to one charge to avoid the possibility of more serious charges, according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit states that city leaders provided the Akron Beacon Journal and other media outlets with information "containing many false and defamatory statements" about Nice.

Rumors have swirled about the alleged recording of Nice since his resignation. Romer said he requested copies of the recording from the city of Akron and the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, which conducted the criminal investigation into Nice, but didn't receive it. The Beacon Journal also filed public records requests with the city and Cuyahoga prosecutor's office and didn't receive a recording.

The case has been assigned to Judge Sara Lioi. Nice is seeking compensatory and punitive damages and attorney fees.

"We're investigating potential damages," Romer said. "We believe they're going to be significant."

City leaders declined Tuesday to answer questions beyond a written statement provided to the media. In that statement, Nischt referred to Nice's lawsuit as "frivolous" and said it won't stop the police department from focusing on its mission.

"The city and Akron Police Department will not be distracted from fulfilling the work the community expects and deserves — responding to the pressing needs and concerns of our citizens," Nischt said.

MAYOR'S CHIEF OF STAFF SAYS REPORT 'COMPLETELY FALSE'

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Doug Livingston
March 28, 2018

The mayor's chief of staff turned to talk radio after a Beacon Journal/Ohio.com headline drew attention to two of Akron's poorer neighborhoods, each getting little or no roads resurfaced this year.

"It won't surprise you when I say that [the] article and that headline is completely false ...," **James Hardy**, chief of staff to Mayor Dan Horrigan, called to tell WAKR (1590-AM) on Friday. "It's unfair and it's inaccurate."

The article stated road resurfacing projects listed in the city's 2018 budget "are missing in nearly all of South Akron. From Interstate 77 to Summit Lake, the citywide plan tackles only one half of one street."

That was true then and now.

"Before the roads proposal was brought to council, we asked for data to let the people of Akron know what roads in their neighborhoods were being repaved. Our story last week went with the best information provided by the city," said Bruce Wings, Akron Beacon Journal/Ohio.com editor. "The story we published last week was accurate then and still is accurate today."

The article appeared online Thursday morning in advance of hitting newsstands the next day. In the absence of data and maps promised to City Council members but still not provided to them or the newspaper, the article mapped all 181 proposed road projects for 2018.

A hole appeared in the middle over Summit Lake and South Akron. The combined area of roughly 7 square miles with nearly 13,000 residents - about 7 percent of the city's population and 10 percent of its area - would get about three city blocks resurfaced in two projects, one fixing the south end of a one-lane alley with a few cracks while missing a northern portion riddled by chuckholes.

"It sends the wrong message that we don't care about poor neighborhoods. This couldn't be farther from the truth," Hardy said of the reporting.

He cited numbers on air that the paper had first requested five days earlier, the day that the council was given and asked to approve the \$6.5 million resurfacing plan. The figures, he said, proved that the city had equitably distributed road projects across all 10 wards based on mileage, cost and tons of asphalt.

But the city divides resources by ward, not neighborhood.

Hardy said the area highlighted by the paper's reporting - characterized as an "unfair, uneducated view of the way we've been doing [road resurfacing] for really a long, long time" - represented a "small group of streets."

COUNCIL COVERAGE

South Akron and Summit Lake have some of the cheapest and most vacant homes in Akron, along with a disproportionate number of minorities, low-income residents, renters and public housing.

The "small group of streets" is shared by three wards. Respective council members say the area needs more attention. But they understand that revenue, propped up by an additional 0.25 percent income tax that passed in November, won't be enough to fix every bad road in Akron, at least not yet.

Two council members said they've asked for years for more funding to address blight and disinvestment in South Akron, hoping to demolish a crumbling 76,250 square foot abandoned factory on Morgan Avenue or spruce up the park beside it. They include roads to the list of deteriorating assets.

The eastern half of South Akron is in Ward 5, represented by Tara Samples. Ward 7 reaches north to grab the bottom of South Akron. It's represented by Councilman Donnie Kammer, who lives south of Archwood Avenue in Firestone Park, the ward's most populous neighborhood. The rest to the west is in Council President Margo Sommerville's Ward 3, which also includes Summit Lake, a neighborhood that will get no road projects this year.

That's not to say the city hasn't invested in Summit Lake. The Summit County Land Bank and the city have teamed up to buy and tear down dozens and dozens of homes there, leaving numerous empty lots now owned and maintained by the city.

CITY RESPONDS

In response to the lack of resurfacing in Summit Lake, Deputy Public Service Director Chris Ludle noted that road conditions are worse in Kenmore on the other side of the lake. With no work south of I-76, city-funded resurfacing in Ward 3 is focused around Vernon Odom Boulevard to the north. "They really are some of the worst streets in my district, and the one I get the most phone calls about," Sommerville said, agreeing with the distribution.

No portion of South Akron in Ward 3 will get repaved.

The city said South Akron street conditions "did not warrant" projects. The Ohio Department of Transportation, with the rerouting and reconstruction of Main Street and Broadway, will do more work there than the city this year.

Kammer's southern portion gets nothing. "I'm happy with all the streets that are getting paved in my ward," he said. "But I'm not saying they're the only ones that need it." In the past couple of years, Kammer said work on streets around state Route 224 "kind of took away" from his portion of South Akron.

Funding has been limited. The city spent less last year to resurface all its streets than it did in 2001, when it was discovered that four times more was needed for a decade to catch up. That level of funding never came, and the resurfacing budget remains a quarter of what city engineers have said is needed today.

Samples' portion of South Akron gets the only two road projects in the entire neighborhood of 8,852 people. "They definitely need more attention paid to them."

She spoke of a "the plight over there" in South Akron where bricks fall from abandoned commercial structures.

Samples suggested that Summa Health, which is in the midst of a \$350 million project to build a new tower elsewhere in her ward, pay for road resurfacing around the new hospital construction, which involves heavy truck traffic. Bruce Kilby sounded open to the idea of the hospital, which is structured for tax purposes as a nonprofit, offsetting costs that could benefit residents elsewhere.

"Let's transfer that equity over to South Akron," said Samples, who did not criticize the mayor's deputy director and director of public service, who work with the council to make sure the streets most complained about get on the list every year. "I believe Chris [Ludle] and John [Moore] do a wonderful job on the part of the city. But I find it hard to believe that nobody over there [in South Akron] calls to complain."

"We try to work with council members, but it has to be a two-way street. This kind of thing is just disheartening," said city spokesperson Ellen Lander-Nischt, who explained that every council member voted for the budget, without objection - twice. Samples, she said, met privately Monday with Moore and Ludle but "expressed no concerns whatsoever about the streets selected."

FORMER AKRON SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER JAMES HARDY APPOINTED CITY'S TRANSITION COORDINATOR, CHIEF OF STAFF

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Stephanie Warsmith
December 1, 2015

Former Akron school board member James Hardy will serve as the city administration's transition coordinator and then as chief of staff beginning in January.

Current Mayor Jeff Fusco, who will return to an at-large seat on council in January, and Mayor-elect Dan Horrigan announced the appointment in a joint news release Monday afternoon. Fusco said Hardy will "set the groundwork for a seamless changeover."

Horrigan said he has known Hardy for 15 years and has seen him emerge as a "committed, thoughtful leader."

"He has always impressed me with his ability to manage complex issues and challenges with integrity and judgment," said Horrigan, the Summit County clerk of courts and a former Akron council member. "His knowledge of Akron, and diverse professional background, make him well-suited for this role."

Hardy, 31, currently serves as an assistant director for community health for Summit County Public Health. Previously he was a special assistant to the president and board of trustees at Kent State University, a regional liaison for former Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner and an executive intern for former President Bill Clinton. When he was elected to the Akron school board in 2005, he was 21 and was thought to be the board's youngest member ever.

Hardy, a lifelong Akron resident, called the appointment "a dream come true." When he was 17, Hardy said he caught the political bug working on Horrigan's Akron City Council campaign. He said they have been friends and colleagues ever since.

"To serve him is truly an honor -- one I intend to work very hard at," said Hardy, who helped with Horrigan's mayoral campaign.

Hardy will begin his chief of staff position Jan. 1. Ellen Lander Nischt, an assistant law director, has been temporarily filling the position and will continue in that role through the end of the year.

Hardy will earn \$106,454 a year.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT - JAMES HARDY

When James Hardy came to Kent State University in September 2009 to work in the Office of the President, he knew he wanted to continue his education as a graduate student. But there was one major problem... James didn't know what program was the right fit for him.

He took initiative, visiting with professors from various programs, asking questions, trying to determine where he would truly excel. This educational exploration continued until he discovered the College of Public Health and felt a connection. The field of public health provided a way for Mr. Hardy to incorporate his varied interests into one professional pathway, and after speaking with Dr. Alemagno, he decided to hone in on a leadership and organizational focus to accelerate his learning.

Now, as the City of Akron Deputy Mayor for Administration and Chief of Staff, Mr. Hardy can put the valuable education he received at Kent State University into practice on a daily basis in his own hometown. He reminds people daily that he is a public health professional, because, as he says, "Inclusive economic development is public health, creating stronger neighborhoods is public health, improving public safety is public health – and the list goes on."

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Deputy Mayor For Integrated Development

Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development

James J. Hardy

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James J. Hardy previously served as Assistant Director of Community Health at Summit County Public Health. There he led the Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit, managing a diverse portfolio of community-based programs and public health services.

Prior to that, he served as Special Assistant to the President and Board of Trustees of Kent State University, as a Regional Director for Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, and as an Executive Office Intern for Former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

In 2005, Hardy was elected to the Akron Public Schools Board of Education. During his six years on the Board he served as chair of several committees, including the Joint Board of Review and the district's Finance and Capital Management Committee, which oversees Akron Public School's \$313 million general fund budget. In 2009, his peers elected him as Board President.

Hardy holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science-Criminal Justice from the University of Akron, and a Masters in Public Health from Kent State University with a concentration in Health Policy and Management.

A lifelong resident of Akron, he is involved in various community organizations including service on the board of Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative (CANAPI). He is a past recipient of the Greater Akron Chamber's *30 For the Future Award* (2011) and Crain's Cleveland Business *Forty Under 40* (2019).

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James Hardy

Deputy Mayor
City of Akron



James Hardy currently serves as Deputy Mayor for the City of Akron. In this role he manages the planning and economic development functions of the City, in addition to Downtown Operations and Recreation and Parks. He previously served as Chief of Staff to the Mayor, Assistant Director of Community of Health at Summit County Public Health, and Special Assistant to the President and Board of Trustees of Kent State University. He is a 2020-21 Fulcrum Fellow at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's Center for Community Investment, a 2019 Crain's Cleveland 40 Under 40 recipient, and a 2011 Greater Akron Chamber 30 For the Future recipient. A lifelong resident of Akron, James serves on numerous non-profit boards and volunteer organizations.

Authors



James J. Hardy | Contributor

Email : JHardy@AkronOhio.gov Twitter : [@JimmyJoeHardy](https://twitter.com/JimmyJoeHardy)

James J. Hardy is deputy mayor for integrated development for Akron, Ohio, and a former assistant director of community health at Summit County Public Health. Previously, he served as special assistant to the president and board of trustees of Kent State University, as a regional director for Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, and as an executive-office intern for President Bill Clinton.

In 2005, Hardy was elected to the Akron Public Schools Board of Education. He served on the board for six years and in 2009 was elected by his peers as its president.

Hardy holds a bachelor's degree in political science and criminal justice from the University of Akron and a master's degree in public health from Kent State University.

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30 For the Future Award
Traeger List of Influencers
Forty Under 40
Traeger List of Influencers

Publications

Getting our parents back together again

A call to civic leaders: Let's create places that foster a better America

James Hardy, MPH

Executive Civic Leader | Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development at City of Akron, Ohio

Akron

Summary

Core Qualifications

- **Organizational and Program Management:** 15 years of leadership experience across a wide variety of civic-centric roles with a focus on launching high-impact initiatives that build strong, equitable communities
- **Strategic Planning and Execution:** Highly skilled at leading high-stakes initiatives, including initial assessment and research, cross-functional coordination across complex networks, and the facilitation of collaboration between diverse stakeholders, with a proven record of success
- **Governmental Administration:** Background includes extensive public health experience in addition to oversight of numerous governmental departments, each with their own unique needs and functions, grant administration and fundraising, city planning and revitalization, vendor management, contract negotiation, coalition building, media relations, and economic development project management
- **Policy Development and Analysis:** Particular specialty in developing community-oriented, philanthropic, and social responsibility programs, with the ability to articulate a clear vision and supporting strategy
- **Community Engagement:** Adept at navigating relations with businesses, governmental entities, community leaders, and the public at large using a “meeting them where they are” philosophy

Experience

City of Akron, Ohio

5 years 4 months

Deputy Mayor for Integrated Development

January 2020 - Present (1 year 3 months)

Cleveland/Akron, Ohio Area

- Provide day-to-day strategic direction for all city planning and economic development functions, including the divisions of Zoning, Long Range Planning, Development, Business Retention and Expansion, Development Engineering, Downtown Operations, and Recreation and Parks
- Serve as the primary liaison to all other economic development organizations in the region
- Oversee the development, Council approval, and implementation of the City's \$337M capital budget
- Manage 161 City parks totaling 3,800 acres, and all recreation functions, including 13 neighborhood-based community centers, 3 public pools, community events, and the City's downtown entertainment venue

Key Contributions

- Spearheaded the Arts and Culture Plan Project, coordinating evaluations of 24 neighborhoods, including extensive data analysis, facilitating city-wide collaboration, securing funding, and developing the final plan
- Successfully raised over \$200K in 3 months for the Arts and Culture Plan

Chief Of Staff

December 2015 - January 2020 (4 years 2 months)

Cleveland/Akron, Ohio Area

- Served as primary aide and senior advisor to Daniel M. Horrigan, the 62nd Mayor of the City of Akron
- Directly supervised Office of the Mayor personnel and all 17 members of the Cabinet across multiple departments, including Communications, Community Relations, Economic Development, Health & Human Services, Finance, Human Resources, Intergovernmental Affairs, Labor Relations, Law, Neighborhood Services, Planning & Urban Development, Public Safety, Public Service, and Office of Information Technology
- Prepared and monitored budgets for the Office of the Mayor, Administration, Police Auditor, Public Safety, Economic Development, Labor Relations, and the Office of Information Technology
- Served as the liaison to all departments citywide, the media, and the Akron City Council
- Managed state and federal relations, directly supervising lobbying contracts and services
- Served as a member of the Emergency Operations Team during citywide emergencies

Key Contributions

- In collaboration with Downtown Akron Partnership, managed the completion of the Downtown Akron Vision and Redevelopment Plan, the first-ever comprehensive plan for downtown Akron
- Managed the implementation of the Akron Blue Ribbon Task Force report on city operations, generating \$11M in revenue and boosting the City's struggling cash reserves
- Oversaw the successful partnership with eBay as the first city in the nation to launch Retail Revival, a program providing brick and mortar retailers support to grow their business online using eBay's platform
- Led federal lobbying efforts to secure two U.S. Department of Transportation T.I.G.E.R. grants to complete a \$31M redesign and reconstruct Main Street in downtown Akron
- Served as the City lead for negotiations to redevelop a blighted block of City-owned structures known as the Bowery Project, a \$42M mixed-use restoration in heart of downtown Akron
- A complete list of successful initiatives available upon request

Kent State University

Adjunct Instructor

August 2014 - December 2019 (5 years 5 months)

- Taught civics and public policy courses to undergraduate students, including:
 - Public Health Planning & Finance
 - Public Health Administration

Summit County Public Health

Assistant Director, Community Health

February 2015 - December 2015 (11 months)

- Responsible for managing and directing the Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit (HESDU)
- Oversaw \$1M+ in annual grants used to address health disparities in Summit County and manage and prevent chronic disease
- Drove the advancement of Summit County's Accountable Care Community initiative entitled Live Healthy Summit County, a multi-sectoral effort to create a culture of health
- Managed the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) 2015 update

Key Contributions

- Spearheaded the creation of the Summit Coalition for Community Health Improvement (SCCHI), a multi-sectoral, agency-based collaborative tasked

with advancing community-wide assessment to promote wellness and reduce health disparities

Summa Health

Development Officer

February 2014 - February 2015 (1 year 1 month)

Akron, Ohio

- Directed advancement for Summa Behavioral Health and co-directed advancement for the Summa Orthopedic Institute
- Identified, engaged, cultivated, and solicited a portfolio of prospects with philanthropic interests across the health system
- Collaborated with physician leaders to strategically develop philanthropic leadership councils to advance the mission and vision of assigned service lines

Key Contributions

- Served as the primary point-person for Summa Health System's involvement in the planning and development of a regional accountable care community initiative, which sought to bring together diverse organizations to address care integration as well as the social determinants of health

Kent State University

Special Assistant, Office of the President and Board of Trustees

September 2009 - February 2014 (4 years 6 months)

Kent, Ohio

- Served as a primary aide to the president of the university
- Managed and coordinated the development and implementation of all special projects
- Organized and executed national searches for executive officer vacancies at the university
- Represented the Office of the President on committees and to other internal and external organizations
- Drafted and edited presentations and official communications
- Oversaw trustee relations involving orientations, fundraising, athletics, and other community initiatives
- Managed governing board finances and budget

Key Contributions

- Staffed the presidential search and transition for the 2013-2014 school year

- Developed and staffed the Joint Project Oversight Committee, a working group comprised of trustees and senior executive officers tasked with managing the \$700M Foundations of Excellence capital initiative

Akron Public Schools

Member, Board of Education

January 2006 - January 2012 (6 years 1 month)

Akron, Ohio

Elected city-wide in 2005 to a four-year term; selected by the Board to fulfill an unexpired two-year term in 2010. Served as Chairman of the Finance and Capital Management Committee, which monitored district finances and physical facilities. Served as Chairman of the Community Relations and Customer Service Committee, which monitored district communications both internally and externally. Served as Chairman of the Joint Board of Review, a committee comprised of city and school leaders tasked with reviewing progress of, and making recommendations for, the \$800 million Imagine Akron school rebuilding plan.

Elected Board President in 2009.

State of Ohio

Regional Director

January 2007 - September 2009 (2 years 9 months)

- Managed the administration of elections in a 7-county region of northeast Ohio
- Advised county election boards on media relations, compliance, and general administration, including budget and policy development
- Organized and directed voter education and outreach activities, as well as engagement with businesses and Chambers of Commerce on business filing compliance
- Served as the spokesperson for the Secretary in various forums and represented the agency at meetings
- Directed all relationship management activities for the Secretary, politically and professionally, in the region

Key Contributions

- Managed counties within the region using statewide decertification of electronic voting machines
- Implemented a post-election audit process

Clinton Foundation

Intern, Immediate Office of the President

January 2006 - June 2006 (6 months)

New York, New York

Education

Kent State University

Master of Public Health (M.P.H.), Health Policy and

Management · (2010 - 2014)

The University of Akron

Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Political Science and Government · (2002 - 2006)