

2021 State of the City – Royal Oak

Kick Off:

Thank you [County Executive] Dave [Coulter] for your kind words. Thank you for your continued partnership helping communities like ours thrive and find success during some of our most challenging times.

Good Morning Everyone! What a beautiful day to open the long anticipated Normandy Oaks Park.

Before we get into the official ceremony opening Normandy Oaks, I am going to take just a few moments to provide a brief state of the city address.

Opening remarks and high level summary:

Without question the past year has been one of the most difficult periods in our city's history. It has also been a period of significant transition as we prepare for our future. We have endured so much as individuals and equally as a community. The loss is real. The challenges we face are real. The pain is real.

During the past year we found the best of who we are and we are rising above the dark clouds of this pandemic and setting our eyes on the a future. A future worthy of our collected spirit and stronger than we could have ever imagined.

Although the past year has been challenging:

- We continue to be one of the safest cities in America
- All things considered, our economy is faring well and business is coming back
- Home values and neighborhood investment is strong
- Roads are getting fixed according to plan and needed updates to our infrastructure are happening
- And we remain on a solid financial footing to help weather storms and keep us thriving

By every measure possible, the state of our city is very good. This is not just my opinion – Royal Oak has been named:

- Best Places to Live in Michigan (Area Vibes)
- Safest Places to Live in Michigan

- Best places for young professionals (Niche Lists)
- Best Suburbs in America
- Best Suburbs to raise a family in America

Challenges of the past year (COVID, etc)

A year and a half ago COVID came essentially out of nowhere and threatened not just our lives but the delivery of the very basic services we need to sustain life. In true Royal Oak fashion, we found a way forward and kept doing what needed to be done. Our city departments went into action identifying innovative and safe ways to serve our residents. Our staff stepped up and got it done – for example:

- Our library completed over 10,000 contactless pickups
- Our Clerk's office administered 3 elections and supported a recorded 20,000 absentee voters
- WROK covered an additional 145 city meetings to ensure continuity and transparency
- Our treasury department found new ways to ease the burdens of payments to the city and work with people struggling to make ends meet

On top of ensuring we maintain continuity in service, we found ways to provide relief for those most impacted by the pandemic. We put CDBG funds from the CARES act immediately into action offering financial assistance to households including food help, rent assistance, hotel vouchers, and utility support.

While COVID has been a significant factor affecting our city, I don't want to dwell on the past. Instead, I want to focus on where we are headed and offer hope of a better tomorrow.

As we look forward we can be proud of our accomplishments as a city. This year we welcome

- Normandy Oaks – beautiful 40 acres of recreational opportunity
- Brand new and much needed community gathering space called City Hall
- New modernized police station which is the envy of the region and will improve our ability to protect the public
- Creation of a downtown park - Centennial Commons will open this fall

- Opening of the Henry Ford Medical Center which will bring exemplary health care services and good paying jobs to Royal Oak
- Renovations of the library including dramatic improvements in the children's area
- We welcomed the Royal Oak Leprechauns baseball team and improvements to Memorial park
- Installed green infrastructure throughout the city demonstrating our commitment to combatting climate change
- Invested \$43k in kitchen equipment upgrades at the senior center, providing additional opportunities to increase meal programming
- Oversaw a total of \$2.6M in park playground and play surface improvements.
- And the list goes on

These accomplishments are the result of our local public leaders, city staff, and residents working together to make progress. We made a plan, stuck to the plan, and saw the plan through - even when faced by the challenges the pandemic presented.

Public Safety:

Royal Oak has been named one of the safest cities in America. In fact, crime is 59% below the average American city. That is remarkable.

This year our Police Department moved into a state of the art facility that will not only enable our officers to be more effective, it is a facility worthy of the region's finest police department. This year our PD hosted our first open house in a long time. It was great to see so many friends gathered to check out the new facility and start our journey back to normal. What was most exciting for me was witnessing the swearing in of three new officers. It is crucial that we attract the very best talent to our PD ranks and continue to build on the positive culture that is essential to keeping us all safe.

Our Fire Department has been extra busy managing through the burdens of the pandemic. Runs and transports are increasing and the demand for services is growing. This year we added a new modern engine and approved a third engine to complete the overhaul of all front line fire engines. Final deliveries should be in March of 2022. Our Fire Department also received 6 LUCAS automatic

compression devices and continues to set the bar for modernized ambulatory and fire services.

Let me be clear: Just like last year, the year before, and since taking office Public Safety will always be our number one priority. We will continue to lead the region in training, innovation, and commitment to the safety of all citizens – regardless of the circumstance. It is critical that we maintain the Public Safety millage to keep our staffing at acceptable levels.

Economic:

The past year has been extremely tough on business. There was no playbook to help our struggling small businesses. I am so proud of how we came together as a community to support local businesses. When a business was in need, everyday people made a call to action and many of us stepped up.

From city hall we began talking to struggling small business owners to see what we could do to help. In partnership with Oakland County, Royal Oak secured \$4.3 million to help our restaurants, retailers, and other businesses negatively impacted by COVID. These grants totaled \$675,000 and were dispersed in Summer 2020.

Included in this effort, this winter, Royal Oak partnered with Oakland County to administer Weatherization Grants for restaurants to facilitate expanding outdoor dining opportunities. These grants totaled nearly \$573 thousand, and included direct cash reimbursements, igloos, greenhouses, propane heaters, and PPE to 50 Royal Oak restaurants.

In partnership with Oakland County, Royal Oak distributed PPE toolkits to over 300 Royal Oak businesses in June 2020. The value of these toolkits was over \$100,000.

We are so grateful for the exceptional partnership we have with Oakland County. County Executive Coulter and Chairman Dave Woodard have listened to our needs and have been instrumental bringing much needed help to Royal Oak.

Additionally, the DDA awarded \$1.3 million to 92 restaurants, retailers, salons, cafes and entertainment venues in Downtown Royal Oak through the Rebound

Royal Oak Small Business Assistance Program. We also established the very popular downtown dollars program and are moving forward with a social district. These efforts earned our DDA, one of six communities in the nation, the Main Street Forward Award from the Main Street America organization.

To help all our businesses across the city, not just in the downtown, we streamlined permitted processes resulting in more outdoor service, outdoor exercise, and other innovative ideas to offset burdens brought on by the pandemic.

I'm also honored to join Executive Coulter's Oakland County COVID-19 Recovery Taskforce to bring our local perspective and develop strategies with other education, business, and nonprofit leaders to get through this pandemic together

Despite the pandemic, Royal Oak celebrated several openings in 2020 through 2021.

We are also the recipient of \$28 million in ARPA funds from the federal government. Congressman Andy Levin is here today and we can't thank him and his staff enough for helping secure this critical funding. He and his staff have been helpful answering our questions and helping us make sure we put this funding to the highest and best use. Congressman Levin – we couldn't have a better advocate the needs of our community in DC. Thank you for all you do.

Neighborhoods and recreation:

Like mentioned earlier we have received lots recognition for what a great place we are to call home.

This year we invested heavily in our parks system. Not only will we open two brand new community parks (Normandy Oaks, Centennial Commons), we saw improvements in many other parks throughout the city to the tune of \$2.6 Million Dollars.

We have remained vigilant completing our local street improvements. We improved over 19 miles of road so far in 2021 and we are replacing more than 2.4 miles of water main. To offset the amount of stormwater entering our system we

installed green infrastructure on Knowles, Fourth, Troy, Washington, here at Normandy oaks, and at city Hall this year. We will continue to find fast and affordable measures to mitigate increasing stresses on our storm water system due to changes in the climate.

We are also taking swift action regarding legacy lead lines that remain in the city. We developed and implemented a lead water service line replacement program which has replaced approximately 225 lead-based water service lines since January 2020; an additional 114 replacements are scheduled this fall.

Royal Oak issued 65 new home permits last year and we are on track to exceed that number in 2021. Home values remain strong and are growing. Neighbors and builders continue to invest in our neighborhoods because living in a safe, fun, and vibrant city is in demand.

Our shared future:

All things considered we are fortunate to be in a very strong position. Just like generations before, it is incumbent upon us to set the next generations up for continued success. The next 100 years matter today.

This year and into next year we will focus on ensuring Royal Oak remains livable for generations to come. We will place stronger focus on sustainability, attainable housing, and solidifying our community as a welcoming place to live and visit.

We have made some progress to date in regards to our environmental priorities including:

- Earning the US Green Building Council's "LEED for Cities Certified" designation (April 2020).
- Completing a Greenhouse Gas Inventory for the city.
- Adopting targets of 40% and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 2050 respectively
- We are converting to LED lights and our new buildings are way more energy efficient than the outdated structures from a year ago.

While it's important to make improvements now, we must have a serious look at our future. This year we will be putting together a complete environmental sustainability plan that will assure we do our part for cleaner air, water, and land.

For those of us that have owned our home for a decade or more, rising home values mean better financial security. However, for some, Royal Oak is at risk of being an unattainable place to live. I'm raising my three children here and I hope one day they will decide to place their roots in Royal Oak and raise their families here. If my daughter decides to be a letter carrier – I want her to be able to live in Royal Oak. If my other daughter decides to be a police officer – I want her to be able to live in Royal Oak. If my son becomes a teacher – I want him to be able to live in the community he was raised in. I know I am not alone in my sentiments. Over the next year we are going to find ways to both grow property value and keep Royal Oak attainable. Trust me, these objectives are not mutually exclusive. It's going to take work, but I know we are up to the task. Whatever we do, we will do together as a community. If we proceed with a master plan update, we will work to get as much citizen participation as possible. We have proven we can do amazing things working together – this park is a testament to that truth. We had an incredible public engagement and what you see here is truly a community designed park.

Close:

It is during the most challenging times we discover who we are. Over the course of the past year we have proven to be resilient, committed, and engaged as a community. The state of our city is very good and the state of our people is extraordinary.

This year marks our 100 year anniversary as a city and we have accomplished so much. The next 100 years is set to be even better because of the spirit of our community is alive. Our resolve is strong. And the commitment we have to each other is unmatched.

Thank You for your time and for being here today. It's my pleasure and honor to serve as your Mayor.

Now let's kick off this joyous occasion and officially open up this amazing park!