



2025 State of the City Address
Mayor James Coffman
March 13, 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today. I want to start off by thanking the Greater Beech Grove Chamber of Commerce for hosting my second State of the City Address. The Chamber is near and dear to my heart, and I am thankful for all they do for both our businesses and the city. And to our friends from the Tea Room of Rustic Root, thank you for a wonderful lunch.

Thank you to the citizens - and friends - that are here today: Clerk Treasurer Stratton, Superintendent of Beech Grove City Schools Doctor Laura Hammack; School Board Members; representatives from Sen. Banks and Rep. Shreve's offices; members of the General Assembly; City Council members Mike Earnest and Avis Frieson; Board of Public Works & Safety members; department heads; my assistant Audra Stanfield; and city employees. Special shoutout to my wife, Jennifer, who is here today. I would not be able to do this job without her love and support.

When I was elected, I knew we needed to change the narrative about Beech Grove. We are a city completely surrounded by Indianapolis, but that isn't what defines us. There are so many positive things and people in our city and it's time we show people just who we are and what we have to offer. Today, I will share a glimpse into where the City has been, where we are today, and where we are headed.

Earlier this year, the Redevelopment Commission members, the REA team, and the City held a community planning week as part of the process to complete a citywide comprehensive plan. REA shared some incredible data about our City that I would like to share with you today.

With a population of more than 15,000 residents:

- The average age is 36.4 years old
- 56 % of our residents are female
- 22 % of our residents have a bachelor's degree or higher
- Our median household income is \$49,452

- The median home value is \$169,500

As we talk about Beech Grove, the state of our city, and what the future holds, I want you to keep this data in mind.

The City of Beech Grove is on the verge of change and our community has residents of all ages, education levels, and income levels, with a workforce of many trades, industries and services. When our comprehensive plan is complete, it will serve as a roadmap of where we are headed, and this data must remain at the forefront of our minds to inform our work as our City moves forward.

With this in mind, three months into my second year as Mayor for the City of Beech Grove, and I am happy to report that the State of the City is strong! I am proud of what took place in 2024, and excited to continue this progress through 2025 and beyond.

A strong city must have a strong economy. We want businesses to locate in Beech Grove. Over the last year, many businesses planted their roots here, from Momentum on Main, Hey Now Pizza, 7 Brew, to The Underground Tattoo, with even more planned for this year.

We also want businesses to do more than just locate here: we want businesses to thrive and expand because of those who support them and because of what our city has to offer.

Here's a great example. Last year we celebrated the growth and expansion of two Main Street businesses: Alice & Agnes and Griffith Flooring. These two businesses chose Beech Grove to launch their dream of small business ownership. They grew their businesses here and contribute to where we are headed as a community. These businesses and their owners are true champions for our City and we must continue to support them.

Main Street is full of owners and employees who strive each and every day to bring people to our City and I am honored to be a part of it.

Main Street is the heart of our City and is home to many events throughout the year. These events happen — year after year — thanks to several civic organizations and volunteers that work tirelessly to ensure that we put our best foot forward every time. From the Beech Grove Promoters Club, The Marks Foundation, the Greater Beech Grove Chamber of Commerce, Beech Grove Artist Collective, Beech

Grove Lions Club, Beech Grove Drug Free Coalition, and Next Stop, Beech Grove, each organization hosts events that enrich our City including the July 3rd fireworks, Dennis Day, the Fall Festival, First Friday Art Walk, Cars R Us, the Easter, Pumpkin, and Polar Express, Music on Main and much more.

Last year, the City hosted two special events that brought people to Beech Grove! The Solar Eclipse was a once in a lifetime opportunity and there were activities throughout the City. Hundreds of people descended on our city as it went completely black for just a couple of moments and the events went off without a hitch.

A few months later, we welcomed people from 39 states to the City of Beech Grove for a special weekend. I would never dream about renaming the City for any reason, let alone for Taylor Swift, but after some heavy encouragement from Clerk Treasurer Stratton, it happened. From November 1st through the 3rd, our City was known as Beech Grove, Taylor's Version. And a weekend of fun events took place. Nearly every local news station reported on these two events — some multiple times! — and local businesses felt the economic effects.

Events in our City, whether they be yearly or special one-time events, capture the attention of developers and people that will likely call Beech Grove home. As these events continue to grow each year, the economic impact is increasing and the effects can be felt throughout the city.

As people visit for events and learn about our city, there is no doubt they will return.

If you walked through the streets of Beech Grove 50 years ago, Main Street was busy and St. Francis Hospital and the surrounding area was full of anchor institutions. Like many cities, we experienced the loss of these institutions and felt the uncertainty of what comes next. But word is spreading about the positive things happening in our city.

I'm proud to announce that there is a rebirth in our City and developers have taken notice of all that happens here and want to be a part of it. While the days of St. Francis Hospital are long gone, the redevelopment of this corridor will make our city even stronger.

Just last month, the City Council heard a rezone request from Mechanical Skills INC to allow them to build a state of the art plumbing school at the old Marsh/Safeway property. This learning facility will welcome nearly 500 students and 21 teachers to

our City. I applaud the RDC for removing the blighted buildings, and the Beech Grove City Council for seeing the long term benefits this development and partnership will bring to the area.

If you follow social media or attend City Council meetings, you saw community engagement with strong opinions for and against this request. But more excitingly, what I saw was a community full of people who love our city, who support our community, and who want to share it with the rest of the world. This is the type of dialogue and collaboration that I want to see between elected officials, community stakeholders, and residents in our city.

Just around the corner, redevelopment will soon take place. These buildings often go by several names...some call them the old medical arts building, or depending on your age, you might refer to them as the old Dr. Atz building or the old Dr. Alig building. Soon, this will be the home of market rate apartments, retail and a restaurant. I look forward to working with the new owners that will breathe much needed life into this key corridor.

And, just down the street the redevelopment continues! Our friends at Our Lady of Grace Monastery recently broke ground on a beautiful new home. The foundation they laid in our City over 60 years ago is still strong and I look forward to seeing their new home take shape so they can continue to serve our great city.

Although we are crafting a city-wide comprehensive plan, development continues to happen all around us. As things change, we must be willing to adapt and modify the course as new investments are made in our City. Any level of development will solidify why we must continue to focus on quality-of-life services that includes a strong focus on public safety. A safe community brings in developers and new investment, it keeps people here for generations, while also encouraging others to make this their home. I am proud to say the City of Beech Grove is committed to providing the needed time, effort and resources to ensure that Beech Grove is a safe community.

The City invested 4.5 million dollars in a training facility and gun range that opened last year. The shooting range at the old police station was named in honor of longtime Beech Grove Police Department Captain Danny Farnworth, who passed away in 2008. Danny was a firearms enthusiast and training specialist. Since the old range is no longer in use, it is only fitting that this new state of the art training facility be dedicated as the Danny Farnworth Memorial Range. Now, the City welcomes several local police departments and agencies that train in our facility,

allowing us to highlight the department, the city's commitment to public safety, and Main Street.

The City of Beech Grove is surrounded by a major metropolitan city and our 39 police officers fight big city crime while providing the small city services that our Citizens have come to enjoy. The department includes two compliance officers that remain busy year round, along with four school resource officers dedicated to our schools. That being said, Chief of Police Michael Maurice knows we must continue to invest in our officers as the world continues to evolve.

In 2021, the City purchased body cameras for all our officers, however, with advances in technology, a new system will be implemented this year. The Department will switch the body camera system over to the Utility Camera system that will include both a body camera and an in-car camera system. Utility offers safety features including an officer down alert, the automatic start of the camera based on run type, automatic start when an officer exits the vehicle or when an officer takes off running. With almost 40 pursuits in 2024, it is imperative that in-car cameras be installed this year.

In addition, every in-car computer will be replaced this year. The current computers were purchased over nine years ago. Our officers need updated equipment at their fingertips, while ensuring information and data is secure.

We are committed to the protection of our employees, but our administration realizes that funds are limited. Later this year, the Beech Grove Public Safety Foundation will be formed to raise awareness for those who serve and protect us every day. One of the foundation's first tasks will be to raise funds for bullet resistant windshields for the entire fleet. Please stay tuned for more information so you can join in on this effort.

2025 is a bittersweet year, as it marks 25 years since the day Officer Bill Toney was murdered while protecting the City of Beech Grove on September 29, 2000. To mark this anniversary, the Beech Grove Police Department, along with the family of Officer Bill Toney, will hold a celebration and fundraiser on Main Street in collaboration with this new Public Safety foundation.

Partnerships in public safety continue to be a priority. Last year, an officer was assigned to the Indiana Crime Gun Task Force, which is made up of many central Indiana police departments. This partnership provides access to tools that Beech Grove simply could not afford without being part of this task force and has led to

the identification and arrest of several violent suspects in and around the Beech Grove area.

The City of Beech Grove is forever grateful for the work our 39 Police Officers do each and every day. I applaud Chief of Police Michael Maurice, Deputy Chief Hurrle and Deputy Chief Mercuri for all they do to protect our City and the Department they lead, while keeping an eye to the future.

Beech Grove City Court Judge Andrew Wells and his team hold court in the Community Room located upstairs at the Beech Grove Police Station. Judge Wells is serving in his 10th year as Judge for the City of Beech Grove. Under Judge Wells' leadership, the Beech Grove Court continues to grow each year, and our court now hears cases from more than 13 municipalities, school corporations, and police departments in Central Indiana. Thank you, Judge Wells, for your service to our community.

In addition to public safety, Beech Grove provides second to none quality of life services that affect many aspects of our residents' daily lives. These services would not be possible without a focus on the fiscal health of our City. Prior to serving as Mayor, I served as the Clerk Treasurer for four years. Fast forward to 2025, and the financial state of the City has never been stronger. I applaud Clerk Treasurer Stratton and her staff for ensuring the fiscal health of our City remains strong.

In 2020, the City had approximately \$4.4 million in the corporate bank account. On January first of this year, the city had more than \$6.6 million dollars in this account. I applaud our City Council and our Department heads for being fiscally conservative while ensuring services are provided and our employees are paid accordingly.

Last October, the City Council approved the 2025 budget, which boosted pay for every employee in our City. In addition, the 2025 budget continues to focus on infrastructure and city services, while also funding the Beech Grove Emergency Medical Services Department. This has been a multi-year process and I appreciate the Council's patience as we navigate how to fund the Beech Grove EMS as a stand-alone department.

With this recently passed budget, our Beech Grove EMS Director Rob Cheshire will increase the number of full-time employees to 15, ensuring the department is staffed to run multiple ambulances 24 hours a day while providing excellent care.

To give you an idea of just how busy this department has been, in 2021 ambulance revenues were \$1.4 million dollars with 4,559 runs. Fast forward, and as a stand-

alone EMS department, revenues were close to \$1.9 million dollars with 5,593 runs. Thank you to the Beech Grove Common Council for continuing to ensure this Department is completely funded, and to Director Cheshire and his team for their work as this department grows.

With this balanced budget, the City of Beech Grove continues to operate in a fiscally responsible manner, with many thanks to the partnerships that have been formed over the last several years. Department of Public Works Director Brad Meriwether has been instrumental in securing grant money from the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization, also known as the IMPO.

Without these additional funds, the City would not be able to complete infrastructure improvements to the magnitude that we have seen over the last few years. The Churchman/Perkins roundabout was completed last year with \$1.5 million in funding awarded by the IMPO. The collaboration between the City, the RDC, and the IMPO slowed the traffic down, making it safer for all those that live or travel in that area.

In 2022, the City of Beech Grove received \$1.2 million for the Hornet Greenway that will be completed this year. This trail goes through the Beech Grove City Schools property and will showcase both our schools and parks, and the beautiful facilities that we have.

But the partnership with the IMPO does not stop there. We were recently awarded \$1.7 million for the Arlington/Hanna roundabout and \$3.5 million for the Emerson/Churchman roundabout from the IMPO. Projects like these will not only provide a safer route of travel, but will undoubtedly spur economic growth in the surrounding areas. These projects amount to an astounding \$7.9 million in IMPO funds. We are forever grateful for their partnership in improving the infrastructure in our City.

In addition, DPW Director Meriwether has secured \$3.6 million in Community Crossing matching grants from the State of Indiana.

In addition to applying for and receiving much needed funding, DPW Director Meriwether oversees a crew of 15 employees who are responsible for trash pick-up, snow removal, road maintenance, stormwater and sewer management, and so much more. Last year, the City acquired two new trash trucks that replaced aging equipment from 2013. The services provided by our DPW employees are second to none, and I thank them for their dedication and service to the City of Beech Grove.

In addition to much needed funding, partnerships with entities like the IMPO benefit the city in many ways. I am proud to serve on the Central Indiana Regional Development Authority board, also known as CIRDA, which is composed of mayors from 28 municipalities. I quickly learned how beneficial serving on executive boards with other Mayors can be. This year, the City of Beech Grove will partner with the Indy Chamber. Being a voice for businesses both small and large is a must and something that I look forward to being as this partnership evolves.

Importantly, with the median age of residents now at 36 years of age, we will work with the Indy Chamber to bring young professionals here with the launch of the MakeMyMove initiative. When applicants look to relocate to the Indianapolis area, Beech Grove will be listed as an option with links showing all that our City has to offer for people of all ages, along with a few incentives to help them choose Beech Grove to call home.

Together, we will work for the greater region and I am thrilled to say that Beech Grove now has a seat at the table and has a voice that will be heard.

With all that is taking place in the City, transparency and access to local government is imperative and a hallmark of my administration. Thanks to Clerk Treasurer Stratton, every public meeting is streamed and posted on Youtube. Because of this, we are well ahead of the state mandate that will happen later this year.

Clerk Treasurer Stratton designed a new website that puts a focus on every department and board throughout our city with a community calendar that lists all events in our city. The calendar continues to grow, and I encourage you to explore the website for valuable information about our City.

Working with our public relations team, we are changing the narrative for the City of Beech Grove. We have implemented a monthly Mayor's Newsletter that is sent to an ever growing list of contacts. Allowing the public a view into the many things that are happening not only in my office, but throughout the city, is important to me.

In addition, the state of the city will be heard a second time for those not able to be here during the work or school day. That being said, if any of you would like to hear a second rendering, I invite you to City Hall at 6:30 this evening; however, I ask that you not spoil the details for others! If there are ever any questions, my door is always open and as my mother Sharon would always say, I am only a phone call, or email away.

While City Hall is a busy place, there are many pockets of activities throughout the city. Last year, we welcomed Hornet Park Community Center Director Tiffani Flick to the team and she hit the ground running. Tiffani, her team, and countless volunteers provide events for the community all week long. Last year, they celebrated the opening of a newly redesigned food pantry that serves more than 100 families each week. This year they will host a touch a truck event in May and expand their fall movie series.

In addition to all that takes place at the center, Tiffani's team works closely with Parks Director Tom Hannan and our Parks Board. Our parks are beautiful and bring people to our city every day, while connecting our schools, neighborhoods, and churches to Main Street. With additional help from their teams, Tiffani and Tom are instrumental in planning and organizing the summer concert series in Sarah T. Bolton Park. Hundreds of people come for these events thanks to their collaboration, hard work, and the sponsorships that they obtain.

Special shout out to the RDC, who recently approved the funding of a new shelter that will be built on the main Franciscan Trail head and serve as a venue for future concerts and events. I appreciate Director Hannan's initiative for bringing this project to light. This spring, the Hornet Greenway will officially open, taking visitors from our Parks through the beautiful Beech Grove High School campus. And early this year, thanks to a grant applied for by the Parks Board, Lick Creek, north of the pedestrian bridge in Sarah T. Bolton Park will see some major clean-up work take place.

I often talk about the importance of partnerships, and the partnership between our City and Beech Grove City Schools are second to none. I applaud Superintendent Dr. Laura Hammack, her team, and the Beech Grove School Board for their dedication to our City and our children. Strong schools make a strong city, and a strong city makes for a strong school system. The We B4 Me philosophy is strong and felt throughout our City.

Together, we strive to ensure all students love where they learn, and that Beech Grove continues to be a community where children are able to learn and grow.

As we look to the future, there is so much to look forward to. Main Street is a destination and will continue to serve as one in 2025. An important destination along Main Street is our Senior Citizens Center.

Last year, the Elton Geshwiler Senior Citizens Center celebrated 50 years of service to our community. I applaud Director Stephanie Bramlett for what she has built at the corner of 6th and Main Street. There are not many senior citizens services around, yet Stephanie has found a way to share all Beech Grove has to offer with people of all ages. From card parties, to dancing, rides to doctor's appointments and grocery stores, trips in the new 15 passenger van, school field trips, to hosting Santa and Mrs. Claus, the Beech Grove Senior Citizens Center offers it all. Stephanie and her team work to make sure our seniors are living their best lives and remain connected to our community.

Finally, as we thoughtfully and proactively change the narrative about our city as we grow, we must forge ahead with a new identity. Our City has long stood behind the phrase, *Where Tradition Welcomes Progress*.

Now, more than ever, that concept is relevant to who Beech Grove is and I'm excited to share this logo with you today! It represents our past, connecting us to the many people who made it possible for us to be here today. But it also looks ahead, to the young family looking for a safe and welcoming community, to the next generation of leaders and public servants, or to a future Mayor, who may be sitting in a Beech Grove City School classroom right now.

In order to continue on our path forward, we must continue to think outside the box. By thinking creatively and pursuing new opportunities, we will continue to enhance our city and affect positive change.

There are so many people that work to improve our city each and every day. If you are an elected official, a school board member, or serve on any of the many boards, commissions, foundations or nonprofits in the City of Beech Grove, please stand and be recognized. If you are a department head or a City of Beech Grove employee, please stand and be recognized.

The future of Beech Grove is bright, and I am honored to serve alongside each of you to make it even better.

To our Citizens. Thank you for entrusting me in this role. You are what makes Beech Grove home. I encourage you all to help improve our City. Come to meetings, share your opinions, volunteer to serve on a city board or a non-profit. Visit Main Street. Go see a game or band competition. Visit our beautiful parks or take a stroll on our trails. But most importantly, I ask you all to do one thing- that is to tell others about

Beech Grove and why it is special to you. By doing this simple task, the state of our City will continue to be strong for years to come.

Thank you again for being here and thanks again to the Chamber and the community center for hosting. Thank you!