

# **State of the City Address**

## **Mayor Steven M. Brown, City of Lincoln Park**

### **March 24, 2005**

It is my pleasure to be with you this evening delivering my fourth State of the City address as Mayor of Lincoln Park. I thank you for being with us tonight and I thank the Rotary Club for their generous sponsorship of this annual event. Lincoln Park and all of us who call this great city our home are fortunate to have outstanding, active service organizations such as the Rotary Club, the Exchange Club, and the Lions Club volunteering and working to make our community better day in and day out. These service organizations, their members, and many other volunteers on city boards, in little league sports organizations, and in countless other groups recognize that being a part of a larger community is a privilege. They also recognize that a city's residents must give of their time and of themselves for a city to reach its full potential. I know this crowd tonight is full of these volunteers so please give yourselves a well deserved round of applause.

I want to take a moment to pay tribute to my father, Hugh K. Brown, Jr. My Dad passed away a few weeks ago after fighting lung cancer for several years. I had the privilege of eulogizing my father both in Lincoln Park and in his hometown of DuBois, PA. That chance to talk about my Dad and what made him special is something I will remember forever, long after the memory of this speech and many others will have long since faded. In that eulogy, I used the theme of big to describe my father. He was a big man that made a big impact on his adopted home of Lincoln Park. He served nineteen years as a little league football coach and thirty-three years as a little league baseball coach and official. He set a standard of public service that inspired me and one that will surely stand the test of time. When I first decided to run for office, I think my father contacted just about everybody he ever said five words to and asked if they would support me and put a lawn sign in their yard. In fact, one of the things I value most about my experiences running for office is the fact that I became closer with my Dad and many of his friends through those experiences. My Dad's big impact also includes the legacy he has left through his five children, his ten grandchildren, and his six great-grandchildren. My Dad will be missed by his family, by his friends, and certainly by me.

I have been serving as an elected official in Lincoln Park for over thirteen years. This past year has been the most challenging and rewarding of my career.

Lincoln Park, like many other communities across this region and this state, has been wrestling with declining revenue sharing payments from state government and the twin and ever increasing impacts of Proposal A and Headlee Rollbacks on property tax revenues. These forces have combined to not just limit the rate of increase on the revenue streams that this community relies on for 73% of our revenue base but to actually

cut those revenues. In fact, the amount of revenue sharing Lincoln Park expects to receive in 2005 is over \$1.5 million less than was forecasted three years ago. This flat to declining revenue picture has combined with spikes in the cost of employee health insurance and other costs on the order of 12% or more annually. Less money coming in combined with more money going out has led to a bleak financial picture. In 2003, we spent into the city's general fund balance, similar to a rainy day fund or savings account, by over \$250,000. In 2004, the amount that we took from the rainy day fund to balance our budget was over \$970,000. Outside auditors recommend that a community maintain a fund balance equivalent to 15 to 20% of the current year's budget to get through difficult times. Lincoln Park's strong and conservative fiscal leadership had built a fund balance cushion of about \$4 million, or approximately 19% of that current budget when these hard times first started impacting our bottom line. However, the remaining fund balance was forecast to be at only about \$1.5 million or 6.3% at the end of our current fiscal year. Continuing to spend into fund balance at the recent rates would have been a recipe for disaster and would have resulted in an outside receiver coming in and taking over this community, imposing draconian cuts that would have gutted our city government. Instead, this mayor and your city council chose a bold path, a path that has our community not just positioned for continued survival and autonomy but actually poised to thrive!

One of the early keys to our resurgence was the decision to hire a city manager in April of 2004. Make no mistake; this represented a revolution in the way that we conduct your city government business. A city manager has brought a previously unheard of level of professionalism and accountability to the way we do business for you. It has also brought an uncompromising focus on the bottom line. I use that phrase carefully. Bottom line in Lincoln Park now means this; we exist to provide the highest level of city services to residents and businesses that choose to call our community home. Simply put, we want to do the best we can for you, economically and efficiently. We will consistently reevaluate our processes, our procedures, and our people to make sure they all contribute to that bottom line. You deserve efficient city services and we WILL provide them.

A key policy implementation that has us well positioned for success is our early retirement incentive program. This administration made a decision that substantial reductions in personnel expenditures had to be made if we were going to survive let alone thrive. This administration also decided the most efficient and least disruptive way to achieve those reductions was through a voluntary early retirement program not through employee layoffs. We developed and offered a program that was ultimately accepted by all employee unions. Under this program, over sixty employees voluntarily took early retirement. We also successfully implemented a reorganization of city government that was made possible by the early retirement program. The net expenditure reduction of this early retirement and reorganization program is projected to be over \$2 million annually. To emphasize and clarify this point, we expect over \$2 million per year in net projected savings after considering the total reduction in expenditures and the costs associated with offering the program.

Financially, this was a huge success. We have eliminated an ongoing structural deficit and positioned our community to continue with a healthy fund balance, the ability to meet our expenditures, and the ability to address some long term needs as well.

There is, however, another side to the success of this reorganization. Yes, we are stronger financially but we are also stronger as a city government team. The remaining employee base has been strengthened by new employees on the frontline and in top management positions and at various levels in between. We have created and staffed new positions that will better position us to meet the challenges and demands of our mission. We have a team of appointees that bring new skills, education, excitement, and experience to their work for our city. We have developed and fostered among our employees a newly found sense of purpose, optimism, excitement, and a level of engagement and outright buy in that I have not seen during my time as an elected official. I am proud of the team of employees we have assembled. The skill level and motivation to deliver high quality services have never been higher among our employees.

Now, how will we translate our restored financial strength and stability and our rediscovered enthusiasm into results?

We will solicit and welcome good ideas from citizens and all levels of employees. We will survey the practices of other communities and when we find ideas that work well we will put them into practice in our community. We want and need creative ideas to reach our goals and we will search those ideas out with no concerns over pride of ownership. We will find the best practices of our business and we will bring them to Lincoln Park.

Our management team will then integrate those ideas into our existing work plans or in place of our existing work plans. One of the strengths of our appointee team is the diversity of experiences they bring to the table. We have people who have spent their entire career with this city. We also have people who joined our team after working in other communities inside and outside the downriver area. We have people with strictly work experience in their field and we have others with experience and education in their respective fields. This diversity of experience, training, and skills provides this community with a strong management team.

We will continue to focus on improving our ability to communicate with residents. Our official website:

[www.citylp.com](http://www.citylp.com)

continues to grow in content and functionality. We have recently committed to the purchase of a fantastic array of new audio/visual equipment to improve the quality of our cable broadcasts and improve our ability to develop and provide information to the community. We want to keep our residents and taxpayers informed about their city government and provide them the means to conveniently communicate and interact with their city government.

We will hold frontline employees and management employees accountable for their actions and their contributions to our success. We have committed ourselves to rigorous and routine reevaluation of the effectiveness of our efforts. We have established policies and procedures to facilitate our efforts and these too will be consistently reevaluated, modified, and improved as necessary and warranted. We will identify what we do well and seek to improve on those strengths. We will find areas where our efforts are coming up short and we will develop and implement new practices to get better. Simply put, this administration is focused on delivering high quality services, efficiently and effectively.

Concrete examples of our successes are already building up.

In the DPS, a long-standing water loss problem of mysterious origin was finally identified and resolved. This should save the city approximately \$20,000 annually.

We are researching the purchase of a hotbox trailer to improve the effectiveness of our cold patching efforts. This trailer would keep more of that cold patch material out of our street gutters and in our potholes.

We are putting together an annual maintenance plan and a remote automation system for our lift stations and retention basin. These stations serve as a primary line of defense against basement flooding problems in heavy rain events. The remote automation system, known as SCADA, which stands for supervisory control and data acquisition, will be the eyes and ears of our Department of Public Services, and ultimately will save the community approximately \$200,000 annually in salaries and benefits when compared to prior budget years. Rather than waiting for problems to occur, we will move proactively to improve this key aspect of our infrastructure.

We are putting together a plan for shifting the focus of our road millage program to a milling and capping plan. We also will likely have an additional \$1 million available for our roads program from the federal government thanks to our joint efforts alongside Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks-Kilpatrick. This policy change and the 60% increase in the available money will allow us to make a lasting impact on many more roads in our community at a time when this relief is so desperately needed.

The aim of all of these DPS initiatives is to provide a high level of service to the residents and taxpayers of Lincoln Park.

We have exciting new programs and plans in place in our Fire Department as well. The staff changes associated with the early retirement program required some very creative thinking and cooperation from our firefighters and our new chief Gil Solis. I am pleased to report to you tonight that the challenge is being met enthusiastically.

The fire department instituted a new training program for new hires made possible by having Engineer Steve Heim qualify as a State Certified Fire Instructor. Under this program, the length of time required before a new firefighter is considered part of our official manpower was reduced from two to three months to just four to five weeks.

Furthermore, these new firefighters are better prepared to assume their new responsibilities within our community.

Cooperation with other city departments as well as entities outside the city has also been key to efforts in our fire department. CDBG funds, administered by our Community Planning and Development Department, have been used to initiate a helmet replacement program, and to purchase a DVD system and a digital camera to improve our fire investigations, firefighter training, fire preplanning, and the firefighter Right-To-Know program. A joint car seat program is being planned with our police department for late summer as well. A smoke detector replacement program has been implemented through donations from Meijer, Allstate Insurance and the Lincoln Park Exchange Club. Under this program, the fire department has been offering one free smoke detector to any resident and approximately one hundred and forty smoke detectors have been given out.

We have negotiated the broad outlines of a new advance life support program and the department has successfully applied for a FEMA grant for \$ 84,000.00 to assist with our implementation of the program. The grant funding will help us pay for some of the additional training and equipment costs associated with this exciting upgrade to the level of fire rescue care available to our community, our families, and our friends.

We have exciting new programs and plans in place in our Police Department as well. Our Police department will be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Police station in June. Our new chief, Thomas Karnes, has made serious improvements to our police station with a focus on making it more functional and more aesthetically pleasing. The Detective Bureau was fully updated and the Booking Room is being remodeled to be safer for both officers and prisoners. Plans are underway to update the Front Desk area and Write-up rooms to allow officers to work more effectively. Many other areas of the Department have been refreshed with a new coat of paint.

The police department also rededicated itself to training. Our officers have undergone more training over the past four months than was provided over the past several years. Officers are receiving firearm, driving, taser, and interviewing training. The Department has also trained officers in crime scene evidence collection. This administration is committed to putting officers with more training on the streets so we can do a better job of providing police services to our community.

Another area receiving a great deal of attention is the general attitude of our police officers. Chief Karnes has made this a real priority by making it clear to our officers that they are to treat our citizens the way they would like a family member treated. This standard, coupled with a professional look and demeanor, has improved the public perception of our officers. Our police department is also emphasizing a team approach and doing whatever is necessary to help in an investigation or a situation. This approach has resulted in some exemplary police work by our officers in the past few months. Examples of this work include the arrest of three subjects who are accused of plaguing city businesses with armed robberies and the arrest of a suspect believed to be responsible for over 20 garage burglaries.

Police department goals for the near future are many and ambitious. We plan to reinstate the Field Training Officer program to better ensure officers are properly trained and meet department standards. We plan to continue to address our police station with an eye toward making the facility work better for officers and residents. We are researching updating our in-house/car computer system to make issuing violations easier and to provide better links with the court and state. We also plan to outfit five police units with in-car cameras to assist in the investigation and conviction of traffic offenses and better defend the department and city against complaints of police misconduct. We have achieved a great deal of improvement in our police department and we have new and exciting plans to build on this success.

Our efforts in economic development have been very successful as well. Thirteen new condos are well under construction between Fort Street and Electric in our downtown development area and should be ready for sale by late summer. The multi-million dollar EZ Storage building is nearing its completion at Howard, Southfield, and I-75. On Fort Street between Lincoln and Garfield, the newly opened Misina Salon and the reopened Lincoln Park Hardware are reenergizing that block of our business district. A new family restaurant named Hobnobs has opened at 1128 Dix between Morris and Reo as well. The much-anticipated opening of the Fort Street Brewery at 1406 Fort has also come about. Located at Fort and Warwick, this microbrewery has quickly established itself as one of downriver's hottest spots for fun, food, and fantastic beer brewed on site.

We have generated tremendous momentum through these and countless other successes. We have shifted our goals and our focus. To use a sports analogy, we are not worrying about hitting home runs in economic development. We are stringing together bunches of singles and doubles by concentrating on working with business owners that are interested in locating or expanding in Lincoln Park. That is our new game plan in Lincoln Park. Our mindset as a city government has fundamentally shifted. We want to be known as the most business friendly community in southeast Michigan. We are committed to accomplishing certification as a Redevelopment Ready City. When we achieve this certification, would-be developers will know that Lincoln Park is serious about bringing new businesses to our community and that we are well prepared to meet their needs. We will further establish our growing reputation as a community that is truthfully open for business.

I want to quickly share a story that was passed on to me by an official and friend of mine at Wayne County. He told me of a friend of his who was looking to buy a home. This person's realtor advised him that Lincoln Park is a hot market and definitely a place he would invest in. Our efforts are being noticed by businesses and by potential residents. They see a community that is reestablishing itself. They see a community that is doing the right things to position itself to succeed and thrive. They see a fantastic place to live and do business.

We are turning a corner in Lincoln Park. The opportunities in front of us are fantastic and growing. We have assembled a great city government team that is ready, willing,

and able to seize opportunities and meet challenges. I am absolutely excited to have the chance to lead my hometown at this point in our history, a time of great opportunity. We are on the cusp of great things and our future is filled with great promise and unlimited potential. I am committed to realizing that potential, seizing our opportunities, and helping our city reach new heights. Please join me and be a part of that bright future. Thank you listening to my report on the state of the City of Lincoln Park, thank you for your interest in our great city, and thank you for being part of what makes Lincoln Park unique. Good evening.