

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS 2024

To the members of the Bessemer City Council, religious leaders, the business community and residents of the city of Bessemer, Good Evening. I thank God for allowing us to be here tonight. Thank you Mr. Terry Dawson for that introduction. I would like to acknowledge my wife, and I thank you for your love and support.

As I reflect on my time as your mayor and see where God has brought this city from, I cannot help but be thankful. The citizens of this city has entrusted my leadership to bring you through many challenges and obstacles over the past 14 years. God has guided us not only through financial disasters, but through ice and snow storms, tornadoes and even a pandemic, and we still stand together strong and unified. I thank God for all the

successes this city has accomplished. I also thank Him for the failures for they have made us stronger as a people and as a city. As we journey into 2025, remember our theme for this four year term, **Renewed Commitment.** My faith tells me that God is not done with Bessemer and we are looking forward to bigger and better accomplishments in our future. Thank you for your unwavering support of this administration.

When I look around and see the businesses and job creations that did not exist before 2010; when I see the recreation center, city hall, the storm shelter, recycling center, the golf course, and all of the streets that have been paved in this city, I am humbled and grateful because I know that God has been with me every step of the way.

Even the naysayers cannot argue with the success of the city of Bessemer.

I am blessed to have the support of a Council filled with members who are prepared every day to serve the people because they love the people – not just the citizens of their district but all the citizens of Bessemer. This Council takes seriously its legislative and fiscal responsibilities. They not only collaborate with the mayor to address issues facing the City they support the City's Departments and employees. Please join me in applauding the members of the City Council individually and collectively.

And although he is now Jefferson County's Assistant Tax Collector - Bessemer Division, I extend a special thanks to past council president, Ron Marshall for his leadership

and support during the three and a half terms he served the city and the citizens of District 5.

Thank you to all the non-profits organizations serving the citizens of Bessemer. Without the commitment, dedication and service of these organizations, the City would experience a significant loss of capacity and face gaps in services needed by youth and seniors. And while the city tries, it cannot be all things to all people. We rely on our non-profit organizations to share their resources, personnel, and expertise with our community; the city is strengthened by their work. I salute them all and thank them for their support. I also must commend the Bessemer Area Chamber of Commerce and the Bessemer Public Library for positively promoting the city, Bessemer businesses and families. Because of their leadership and

commitment to Bessemer, the city hosted more than thirty community events, from cultural festivals to health fairs and other events aimed at strengthening the family and unifying the community.

I am tremendously satisfied when I can see your tax dollars at work. Under this administration, 295 various streets have been paved, representing almost 100 miles of paving. We have been able to leverage our local funds with state and federal dollars and as a result, we have spent over 20 million dollars paving roads in Bessemer, which makes our streets among some of the best paved streets in Jefferson County. As I speak, we are continuing to pave more streets in our city.

I am tremendously proud as your mayor that our city remains fiscally strong. The city budgeted seventy-four

million dollars last year, brought in revenue of seventy-two million dollars and our actual expenditures amount was sixty-seven and one half million dollars. The city renewed 4,696 business licenses and had a total of 4,380 businesses paying occupational taxes in 2024.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is a federal law that was passed in March 2021 to provide direct relief to Americans and provide direct relief to cities, towns, and villages in the United States. Under this Act, the city received \$13,970,941.00. As of September 30, 2023, the city has obligated 100% of the American Rescue funds to projects and programs under the ARPA guidelines. As of September 30, 2024, the city has expensed 73% of the American Rescue funds. This is so important because if this

money is not spent, it has to be refunded to the Federal Government.

The Finance Department utilized ARPA funds by implementing a new financial software system. The new financial software system will bring the city up to date with technology. The first phase of the new software system; **Finance, Accounts Payable and Revenue**, went live on October 4, 2024. The second phase of the new system; **Payroll**, went live on January 1, 2025 and the third phase of the new software system; **Public Improvement, City Clerk and Building**, went live on January 15, 2025.

The city performed inspection services on new construction projects and project improvements. We issued building permits exceeding approximately 23 million dollars for commercial projects and nine million for residential

projects within the city of Bessemer. Some of the new projects include Harbor Freight on Academy Drive, Aldi on Morgan Road, new Condos and apartments renovations on Ninth Avenue SW. The city's residential construction includes new homes construction in the Cedar Creek community; on the North and Southside of Bessemer; Habitat for Humanity in the Hopewell community and remodeling of apartments on Berkley Avenue.

Bessemer City Schools made remarkable progress in the school year 2023-2024. They completed or started six of ten capital projects, contributing to the district's improved scores.

I still believe in our local school system. I encourage everyone to continue to pray for and support the Bessemer school system. Our most precious resource to the future

success of the city of Bessemer is our children. Bessemer City Schools have maintained a strong focus on enhancing academic outcomes for all students. The 2023-2024 state report card highlights the positive impact of this effort, reflecting the dedication and hard work of students, teachers and staff. Our school system continues to invest in academics to enhance the learning process, as well as infrastructure. The school district will invest eight million dollars in capital improvements at all of our elementary schools, the High School, and New Horizon Alternative School.

In keeping with my theme, **Renewed Commitment (Notable Progress)**, I will continue to build on the accomplishments of this administration. As proud as I am

of Bessemer's progress, I recognize that there is still work to be done.

The city, together with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, and a consultant team led by PlaceMakers, a community planning group, developed The Gameplan for Growth – Bessemer's comprehensive planning effort that lays out our intentions for future growth, covering transportation, infrastructure, public services, and preservation. Over three hundred residents, businesses and other interest parties participated in development of the plan through public meetings.

The city, in collaboration with the Bessemer Historical Preservation Commission worked together to include the creation of a Downtown Historic District's Certification of Appropriateness – with the aim of creating uniformity in

development in the Downtown Historic District. The goal is to protect and preserve our historic assets.

We appreciate all who participated in the process and thank our Economic and Community Development Department for spearheading this project on behalf of the city.

We will continue to focus on our downtown to recruit more businesses. We have completed another streetscape project on 19th Street between 1st Avenue and 4th Avenue. We have secured funding on another streetscape project that will enhance the sidewalks, lighting and appearance of downtown on 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue and 4th Avenue between 19th and 20th Street. We will continue to invest in downtown to make it more attractive to potential businesses.

The health and safety of our citizens remain my number one priority. We will continue to invest greatly in our police department to ensure the city is safe. I pause to offer my condolences to those families who experienced loss in their families from acts of violence. I remain committed to making sure those who inflict violence are brought to justice. Overall crime decreased in our city significantly, but unfortunately, homicide rate increased 10% due to senseless gun violence. The city experienced 11 homicides in 2024. Of those 11 homicides, one was classified as a traffic homicide by the Coroner's office; of the other 10 homicides, the Criminal Investigation Division solved 9 of the cases, and the remaining case is under investigation and suspects have been identified. Regrettably, homicides increased from 2023, but the city had reductions in many

other major areas of crime including 60% reduction in robberies and 39% in unauthorized breaking and entering of vehicles.

In 2024, the city purchased a Mobile Command Center at a cost of \$900,000.00 to assist our officers at fighting crime. This will allow the police department to set up a mobile prescient in high crime areas to address criminal activity.

We will continue to aggressively recruit new police officers and invest in whatever equipment is necessary to ensure the safety of our citizens. Programs like the Marvel City Juvenile Justice Program, the District Attorney's Second Chance Job Fair, and our Crime Prevention program, are all assisting to alleviate crime in our city. With the help of federal grant funds and funds from the Jefferson County

Commission, the Police Department increased the number of pole cameras throughout the city from 32 to 54. These cameras augment the Department's ability to surveille large neighborhoods and corridors that traditionally require multiple officers to patrol. I cannot say enough about the boost to operational readiness these cameras give the Police Department. If we want to eradicate crime in our city, state and nation, it will take a collaborative effort of all these agencies working together.

I am proud of our fire services and watching the devastation in California has made me appreciate them even more. We have invested greatly in this department to make sure they are equipped with all of the latest equipment to protect the health and safety of our citizens. In the past three years we have purchased three pumper

trucks at a cost of 1.8 million dollars; a ladder truck costing 1.2 million dollars and two transport units at a cost of \$500,000.00, to ensure your safety. The department responded to 935 emergency calls last year and the two new transport units served a critical role in providing emergency services and saving lives in our community. This year, we are excited to announce that we are building a two million dollar fire station Annex that will house our new ladder truck. This project is currently in the designing phase with the start of construction to begin in late summer or early fall of this year. I am proud that as a result of being adequately manned and providing extensive training and education for our personnel and citizens, we were blessed to have no fire deaths in the city during 2024.

If it is truly our desire to have a clean city, I need you, the citizens, to assist us in doing your part. It is getting increasingly difficult to hire and retain employees in this area. I want to recognize our employees in the Street and Sanitation Department for what you do every day to maintain the cleanliness of our city. We know that this is not an easy job. Thank you.

The city's Public Improvements Department answers calls for service from all areas to include Animal Control, weed nuisance abatement, recycling, garbage, refuse and trash collection just to name a few. The department is also responsible for maintaining streets and rights-of-ways, traffic signals and signs. Despite constantly battling staffing shortages, the department met the needs of the citizens in 2024.

We are having to create new ways to provide service to the citizens in this area. We are continuing to purchase equipment, but we recognize that manpower is an obvious challenge going forward. Because of our inability to hire and retain employees, we may be forced to explore the possibility of transferring garbage collection services to a private company. The city, thanks to the assistance of ARPA funding, purchased 1.2 million dollars in heavy equipment which included a new ALTEC Aerial Bucket Truck, a Kenworth trash truck, a Kenworth Tri-Axle Dump Truck and five labor crew trucks. I cannot emphasize enough how committed we are to keeping this city clean, but we need the help of you the citizens.

The Fleet Maintenance Department ensures our city continues to run smoothly and sustainably. It keeps the

city's fleet moving. It is not enough to purchase state-of-the-art equipment, we must have certified professionals, equipped with the latest diagnostic software and a properly equipped facility in which to maintain and repair the city's investments. In 2024, our Fleet Maintenance Department demonstrated exceptional performance and innovation, ensuring that our city's vehicles and equipment operate at peak efficiency. By improving preventive maintenance schedules, we experienced fewer unexpected breakdowns and increased reliability of city-owned vehicles. Fleet Maintenance reduced vehicle downtime thereby decreasing service interruptions across all departments.

One of the major signs of pride in a city can be seen in the way it cares for its parks. Bessemer, I assure you our parks are a point of pride. This administration is committed

to ensuring that the citizens of Bessemer have safe, convenient, and well-maintained parks and green spaces. In 2024, we updated and made improvements to five city parks. They include Alex Bradford, Carver, Debardeleben, Enoch Brown, and McNeil.

In our continued efforts to bring our Bessemer Civic Center into the 21st century, we have painted the facility throughout, replaced the flooring, installed a new sound system, and completed a landscaping and irrigation project and may other upgrades. In 2024, we replaced the roof on the civic Center at a cost of five hundred fifty thousand dollars, replaced the heating and air conditioner chillers at a cost of four hundred thousand dollars, and upgraded all of the equipment in the kitchen, all in an effort to keep our

Bessemer Civic Center competitive with other venues in the area.

As our city grows with commercial and residential growth, Bessemer Utilities is making efforts to continue to meet these future challenges. The utilities have completed the installation of a water tank on 15th Street, replaced over twelve thousand galvanized water mains, and replaced over seven thousand water service lines in the system. In 2025, a new software system will be installed to better assist our customers with billing, metering, new account setups and with payroll.

One of the apples of the city's eye, the Bessemer Park and Recreation Center, continued to offer recreational activities in 2024. The recreation center saw an increase in its membership and annual usage. The health and wellbeing

of the citizens is one of its primary focuses and a considerable amount of its programming is geared towards reducing health disparities in our community. Last year, we hired a new Director of Parks and Recreation. I would like to introduce to you Ms. Marketa Smith. She took over operations of our center in June of last year and is doing an awesome job. I am proud of all of the partnerships, as well as programs we have successfully created at our recreation center and we are excited about the future recreations in our city. Our Aquatics department made necessary improvements to keep us on the cutting edge. We installed a \$650,000.00 generator to the building in case of a natural disaster. So we are prepared to care for the community.

Impressed is the only word I can find to describe the state of the Frank House Golf Course at the close of 2024.

Another jewel in the city's crown, the golf course exceeded all expectations as revenue grew 11.4% for the year. Simply put, we projected revenue of \$953,697.00; amazingly, we exceeded our projection generating revenue of over \$1,000,000.00 in 2024. The investments we made in the golf course are paying BIG Dividends! Frank House's Golf Professional, Ed Davis, has steered the city's golf course for the past nine years and seen its revenue rise from \$223,000.00 in 2015 to over \$1,000,000.00 in 2024.

I am proud to report Bessemer's Regional Airport experienced significant growth and development in 2024. The city thanks Congresswoman Terri Sewell for her support as she secured a \$500,000.00 HUD grant to go towards the construction of the Bessemer Municipal Airport (EKY) Drone Cage. The Drone Cage will support drone

research and development by researchers from the University of Alabama Department of Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics. More remarkable things are coming to Bessemer's Municipal Airport as ALDOT's Aeronautics Bureau issued the Airport a FY 2025 "Go Letter" for its aircraft parking apron design and taxi lane reconstruction projects totaling approximately \$1,825,925.00. With this upgrade, the airport will be even more sought-after by private airplane owners and pilots.

The National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems is a five-year plan maintained by the Secretary of Transportation that is updated every two years. The Fiscal Year 2025-2029 NPIAS has reclassified the Bessemer Municipal Airport from a Regional Airport to a **National Airport**, one of only 122 U.S. General Aviation airports classified as National Airports.

The airport has been designated as a National Airport having met the following criteria: 5,000 or more instrument operations; 11 or more based jets; 20 or more international flights or 500 or more interstate departures. Simply put, Bessemer Airport is in great demand. I applaud the Airport Authority Board and staff for its vision, forward thinking and progress made at the airport.

Our Information Technology Department has been at the forefront of great innovation in the city. This department has new leadership. I would like to introduce Mr. Henry Louvier. In 2025 he will be making sure we are aligned with best practices for service, efficiency and security. IT will be working hard to make sure that all departments have all the latest technology as we move further into the 21st century.

As I bring this address to a close, I proudly announce that the City is WELL! It is with a renewed commitment, new energy, and anticipation that I share our accomplishments. I want to share with you a bold vision for our city's future; one rooted in progress, innovation, and opportunity. Together we will explore the possibility of constructing a new Municipal Court and Jail facility designed to improve public safety and enhance the efficiency of our justice system. This is not a small task, but just as my administration led the conversation and executed the implementation for a new Recycling Center, a new City Hall, a walking trail, a Pedestrian Bridge and the city's first ever Youth and Senior Recreation Facility, this project can become a reality as well.

The future of our city is bright and it is powered by passion, dedication, and vision with each one of you in mind. Let's keep moving forward Together! Thank You and May God continue to bless you and the Marvel City of Bessemer.