



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CRAIG GREENBERG

September 1, 2023

Dear Commissioners,

As you prepare to vote on recommendations of the Louisville Metro Comprehensive Review Commission, I ask that you consider the challenges and opportunities we have as a city right now.

Metro Louisville, like most cities across the country, is at a pivotal moment. The pandemic and resulting economic fallout have changed the look and role of downtowns nationwide. There are cities that are embracing this change and making the investments needed to be an urban center of the future and there are ones that are not. Those in the later category will face ever accelerating reduction in property values and payroll taxes that fund public safety and infrastructure which, in turn, will contribute to a further erosion of the tax base - to put it bluntly, an economic death spiral. I ran for Mayor because I know Louisville can be a city of the future and Kentucky can be a state of the future. I'm committed to working together and continuing to build strong partnerships with our elected leaders in Frankfort and Louisville to make this happen.

The massive societal changes we have experienced over the last three years are not over. During the next two decades experts anticipate a new migration to the middle of the country, as the costs of extreme weather and wildfires make living on our coasts and in much of the West too expensive for many families. Our central location, our abundant water supply and our relatively low threat of extreme weather events make us a strong candidate to recruit new talent leaving these areas, and we need this population growth. Unlike most of our peer cities, we are losing population in the prime working ages, which hinders our ability to attract new companies and to keep our growing companies local. This migration presents us with an incredible opportunity that could have ripple effects across our city and Commonwealth. We know that the talented young workforce of the future - the people we need to get to move to Louisville or stay in Louisville - want dense, walkable cities. We know that we must revitalize downtown, which is the driver of the Metro Louisville economy, and in turn Metro Louisville is the driver of the state economy. We need to start now.

We can build entire new residential neighborhoods in the core of our city through major investments in office conversions, new public spaces, public safety enhancements and other incentives. This will help balance the recent population growth in our unincorporated areas and grow our tax base in the Urban Services District. Promoting infill development where there is already road, sewer, and public transit infrastructure will also ease some of the growing pains mentioned by the public in the Commission meetings.

The reason that I am raising these issues with the Louisville Metro Comprehensive Review Commission is because I need your help and hope you will be a partner in this work. As the Commission has reported, Louisville is already at a disadvantage in revenue and expenditures compared to our peer cities. We need local tax flexibility so that we can fix funding shortfalls across our city and make critical economic development investments. At a minimum, we cannot afford to lose any of the limited tax revenue we receive.

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As Jeff O'Brien, the Director of my Economic Development Cabinet testified, we also cannot afford to lose population to other states. Being a top 50 city is key to our work to bring new businesses to Louisville.

Investment in downtown is critical, but it is not my only focus. In the upcoming session, I will be asking our elected leaders in Frankfort to create a State Affordable Housing Tax Credit to inject significant resources in the creation of multi-family and single-family affordable housing. This will help address affordable housing needs Metro-wide. One focus of this effort needs to be on creating new affordable home ownership opportunities. I'm investing in improvements to Louisville Metro Government's planning and zoning regulations and processes to address community concerns, including those raised by this Commission. My team is developing better standards to ensure adequate infrastructure exists or will be built before developments are approved. Additionally, we are identifying priority areas – areas where we have adequate infrastructure – for new multi-family housing projects.

While Dr. Coomes acknowledged that there were significant inaccuracies with the capital investment portion of his report and recommended it not be used by the Commission, we plan to conduct an inventory and assessment of all our infrastructure assets, expanding upon the technical review process currently in place for paving. This will help ensure that we are always investing in the greatest need Metro-wide. It is also critical that we fix the road fund and other state funding formulas that significantly shortchange urban areas.

These initiatives are all key for our economic development, but I also fully recognize that we cannot be a city of the future and recruit and retain the talent we need if people do not feel safe in Louisville. Everyone on this Commission is aware of the staffing shortages we face at LMPD. As of today, we are 269 officers short of a fully authorized force of 1328 sworn officers. That is why I reinstated the city's bonus program to help recruit and retain officers, and why this year's budget significantly invests in new targeted and digital recruiting efforts. We are creating a new LMPD Wellness Center and police headquarters to keep more officers healthy, engaged, and on the job. The state could support these efforts with enhancements to first responder pension benefits and other investments in local law enforcement resources.

As Jody Meiman, Executive Director of Metro Emergency Services, explained in his testimony before the Commission, EMS is also facing a major staffing shortage. While Metro EMS current owns 60 ambulances, they can only deploy 20 at any given time because of the lack of EMTs and paramedics. Metro Emergency Services is currently working on a plan to recruit more EMTs and paramedics to better compete with the higher pay and benefits of the suburban Fire/EMS departments. We are also implementing a network of diversion programs that will help resolve many of the issues raised about EMS runs by this Commission. The city has allocated \$6 million to implement a deflection program for certain types of mental health runs in all eight LMPD divisions. We are implementing nurse triage programs to handle non-emergency calls and a pilot program to prevent re-admissions. These programs should significantly reduce the number of low acuity and mental health runs and keep ambulances available Metro-wide.

I've been in office for just 8 months, and I've taken steps to address many of the concerns raised during the Commission hearings. Some initiatives are just getting started or will soon be underway. I ask that you give them time to work before recommending or pursuing major changes that could risk negative or unintended consequences for the future of the entire Metro region.

Unlike our state government, we are not sitting on the largest rainy-day fund in history. If the state makes legislative changes that reduce revenue from the city's general fund, we will have to cut services and leave critical investments on the shelf, especially in our highest need neighborhoods. We cannot afford to do either. If you look at the cities across the country that are thriving, they are not cutting funding, they are making huge investments in their urban core. They understand that our workforce has changed, and our population will

continue to change. They are capitalizing on it. I want that for Louisville. I want us to be one of the great, vibrant cities of America's future, and I have no doubt you want that too. That would benefit every resident of Metro Louisville in every neighborhood, as well as entire Commonwealth of Kentucky.

I am confident we can get there if we work together and turn these challenges we face into opportunities: to invest in Metro Louisville and transform our hometown and state for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Greenberg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Craig Greenberg
Mayor