

# All ways, moving forward.

## 2022 State of the County Address David Coulter, Oakland County Executive

Tuesday, March 15, 2022  
M1 Concourse • Pontiac, Michigan

As Prepared for Delivery

Welcome everyone to the beautiful M1 Concourse and the 2022 State of the County address.

I'd especially like to welcome Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, Wayne County Executive Warren Evans, and Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel.

Now Warren would have ridden in here on a horse, and Mark – of course -- a sheriff's car. The exciting vehicle I had the privilege of driving in tonight is GM's all-electric Chevrolet Bolt EUV – produced right here in Oakland County at GM's Orion assembly plant.

I'd like to thank plant director Reuben Jones, UAW Local 5960 Chairman Jason Leist and Local President Louis Rocha, and all of the hard-working men and women at the Orion plant.

Because of their excellence and collaboration, GM recently announced a \$4 billion investment to build the Chevrolet Silverado EV and electric GMC Sierra at Orion. It's expected that this investment will add more than 2,300 new jobs and retain another 1,000 jobs when the plant is fully up-and-running.

Orion is now etched in GM history as part of its largest ever single investment. Let that sink in. It also places Michigan as the recognized hub of innovation in the U.S. for EV development and EV manufacturing. That distinction is truly priceless.

I had the honor of being in Lansing with Orion Township Supervisor Chris Barnett on the day of the announcement. It was a proud day for Michigan, Oakland County and the Orion plant. Let's give Chris, and everyone who helped to create the development package to keep this investment here in Oakland County -- a big round of applause!

New investment is the lifeblood of economic development. It creates jobs, stabilizes communities, drives spinoff business and shines a positive light on our workforce. Because of this extraordinary investment, other businesses will come to Oakland County, and the opportunities they bring are endless.

This is just one example of how Oakland County is All ways, moving forward.

You'll be hearing that phrase a lot from me tonight – and in the coming years. It's our way of putting into words what really matters: In every facet of our work, we commit – with all of our residents and business -- to moving forward.

We're a global neighborhood accountable to each other, and lasting success only comes when we all succeed.

These values were instilled in me at a young age. My dad was a land surveyor, and my mom stayed at home to raise my brother, sister and me.

I grew up on the east side, went to Catholic school and came to Ferndale in my thirties. I chose Oakland County because it made me feel welcome and safe, and it was a great place to make a living. We all have different stories of how we came to be Oakland County residents, but I think we all share the same deep affection for this place we call home.

When I came to office nearly three years ago, I came with a philosophy of Oakland Together, which embodies collaboration and partnerships for the good of Oakland County's residents, businesses and communities.

That principle has served us well as we've navigated new ways to support and invest in all of our communities. That includes testing, vaccinating and boosting hundreds of thousands of our residents. There is now hope on the horizon.

That is not to say our work is done. We'll always face hard issues. The lingering pandemic is keeping us from what we've comfortably known as normal. Residents are anxious about everything from inflation, education, a worker shortage to the Russian invasion in Ukraine.

So am I.

Recently, I attended a Ukrainian prayer service in Southfield. I joined my longtime friend, Andrey Duzyj, and many others to extend our support to protect this democracy. Our Ukrainian American community is an important part of our County, our region, and the entire state.

While many of these issues face lawmakers in Lansing and Washington, D.C., Oakland County government is fighting on the side of our residents to solve the issues right in front of us.

I believe in the power of our people. That together – Oakland Together – we can leverage our strengths to address our challenges in All ways, moving forward.

Whether you are from one of our thriving cities, strong suburbs, or beautiful rural areas you are part of the fabric of what makes this county a community.

Unfortunately, there are times when one of our communities suffers a tremendous tragedy.

When that happens, we all suffer.

We are all – and always – Oxford Strong.

Tate Myre, Hana St. Juliana, Madisyn Baldwin and Justin Shilling, represented the best of Oakland County. They were athletes and academic standouts, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters and friends to so many. They were bright lights who were taken far too early and we can never forget their names or their legacies.

I want to thank and acknowledge the leadership of Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald and Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard.

None of us will ever forget those suffering from the events of that day. We will continue our support for Oxford and our strong partnership with that community. Jack Curtis, the Supervisor of Oxford Township is here with us tonight.

We've learned so much from the challenges of the last two years, most importantly, that we

can't remain static. We have to be nimble and adapt to new circumstances. We need a plan for the future -- and strategies to help keep our residents, businesses and communities healthy --- economically, physically and emotionally.

So, with that in mind, tonight, I am unveiling our new Roadmap for the Future. It's a strategic plan that will guide our efforts as a county and as a government over the next 5 years.

It is ambitious, it's data-driven, and it will require collaborative, bi-partisan, community-based efforts to be successful. Thankfully, that collaboration...that leadership...is right here in this room.

Our new strategic roadmap charts a course for the future of the county. It includes a mission statement, a set of goals and priorities.

Most importantly, it includes ways to measure our progress. We are holding ourselves accountable and we want you to do the same. Starting tonight – everyone can track how we're doing —right on the county's website – [OAKGOV.COM](http://OAKGOV.COM).

Our mission statement is simple, but powerful: To serve through collaborative leadership and to help support communities where residents flourish and businesses thrive.

Throughout the year, I've had the privilege of meeting with a variety of folks who've provided their thoughts on how the County is doing, where help is needed, and ideas for improvement.

Here's what I've heard: Residents want a strong economy, and training programs to help prepare workers for high-paying, in-demand jobs. They've asked for accessible health care – including mental health – and affordable housing. They've told me that we need to help our kids catch up in school. And they want Oakland County to be a place where people feel safe, heard and welcomed.

In other words, they want the County to be All ways, moving forward. So that's what we're going to do.

We're committing Oakland County -- our employees, our resources, our programs and services -- to making a real and measurable impact in the areas that matter most --

- A strong economy
- Healthy and safe communities
- And opportunities for residents to live their best lives

First, a strong economy. We're doubling down on Oakland County's reputation as the best place to do business. And we're making sure all of our residents and businesses have the opportunity to succeed.

For the last two years, we've helped more than 15,000 small businesses survive the economic impact of COVID.

We're taking it a step further this year with a new program we're calling Business Forward. It's designed to help entrepreneurs successfully emerge from the pandemic and grow their small businesses. With a team of nine business consultants, this program will bring resources straight to small business owners right in their own communities.

Here's a little more about the Business Forward program:

***VIDEO:***

We expect this team to support 10-times the number of businesses than we've reached in year's past.

We've also recently created a revolving loan fund for emerging entrepreneurs and small businesses that need financial support to break through the barriers to doing business. This fund will help start-up companies and minority, women and veteran-owned businesses with the resources they need to follow their dreams of becoming successful entrepreneurs.

Project Diamond -- a grant program created in collaboration with Automation Alley - is helping small manufacturers gain access to the growing advanced technology sector by cutting costs and manufacturing time. Last fall, I visited Air and Liquid Systems in Rochester Hills. They are one of 250 companies that received a 3-D printer through this program.

Company owner Jim Miller says advanced manufacturing technology is a game changer. Where a simple fastener used to cost the company \$98 apiece to produce, the hi-tech printer allows Jim to cut that cost to roughly \$2.45. The company is now more competitive and capable of securing new contracts and with those contracts, new workers.

Our Economic Development team is working with businesses like this across the county to transform our advanced manufacturing industry into a global ecosystem that supports digital tools and diversification. Our team is becoming even more nimble to ensure hi-tech industries locate and expand right here in Oakland County.

Next is our commitment to safe and healthy communities. Accessible, affordable programs that help our residents live healthy lives – both mentally and physically - remain a top priority.

We're making significant progress on this front with the expansion of our Health360 clinics in Pontiac and Southfield that provide both health care and wraparound services for residents. We have built offices right in our clinics and our partner, Honor Community Health, is providing primary care services on site. Deb Brinson, the CEO of Honor Community Health ... thanks for being here with us tonight.

And, if someone comes to the clinic for a flu shot, we can also connect them with other important services they might need, such as food assistance or transportation for medical services. I'm thankful to our partners from Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency for their help on this front.

We also provided hearing tests to more than 45,000 students last year. That might not sound like a big deal. But for one student – 10-year-old Evan from Troy – that hearing test proved to be lifesaving. His test led to the discovery of a dangerous cyst that was growing right next to his brain that doctors – thankfully -- were able to remove to prevent catastrophic hearing loss.

We're focused on the big things, and the seemingly small things, too. We are, All ways, moving forward.

We knew, even before the outbreak of COVID, that the number of American's living with mental health issues was at a crisis level. That's why we've invested nearly \$13 million in a variety of

services.

We've allocated \$8.5 million in grants to non-profit agencies to help an additional 66,000 residents with critical counseling and care. Another \$2 million is helping hospitals quickly evaluate people in their emergencies rooms and get them the care they need.

And, \$2 million went to support our students, when we established the Mental Health and Wellbeing School Partnership Program. In this program, Health Navigators work directly with Oakland County school professionals to increase mental health services -- providing a safety net beyond the resources available at their local schools.

As I mentioned, what matters most to our residents is a strong economy, healthy and safe communities, and opportunities to live their best lives.

What empowers a great life? There's no single answer.

Workforce development is one such opportunity. In today's red-hot job market, it's important that our residents are prepared to enter new and exciting careers. Virtually every industry is demanding a highly trained workforce, so we're giving our residents the tools to cash in on those high paying jobs.

We are expanding our Oakland80 program by deploying new Career and Education Navigators throughout the County. I'm pleased to announce tonight that Jewish Vocational Services will serve as our partner to launch this program. Paul Blatt, the CEO, is here with us tonight.

As you might know, Oakland80 means helping 80 percent of our adults secure a college education or certified training by 2030. Not only are we the only county with a post-secondary goal, we have the actions to back it up.

Oakland80 will build on our already strong workforce development system to eliminate the barriers our residents face when taking this next step.

When that happens, not only can residents find job satisfaction and better provide for their families, they help make Oakland County even more competitive. A highly skilled workforce is

among the most important attributes an area can have when attracting new business.

Thanks to partners like the State of Michigan, many residents have access to scholarships. The Reconnect Program and Futures for Frontliners are helping thousands of people return to the classroom.

But even with tuition assistance, the cost of books, transportation and child-care can sidetrack the best of intentions. That's where Oakland80 and Oakland County Michigan Works step in, to eliminate those roadblocks.

Asia Jefferson is currently a part-time phlebotomist – a job that pays her less than \$15-an-hour.

Wanting more for her two children, this single mother from Holly is now enrolled in Community College thanks to a Michigan Reconnect and Oakland80 tuition scholarships. Asia also receives American Rescue Plan funding, courtesy of Oakland County, to help with the cost of books and childcare. Soon, Asia will be joining the workforce with her brand-new nursing degree and an opportunity to help her family live their best lives.

Arin Minasian moved from California to Oakland County to participate in an innovative new apprenticeship program for application developers. It's a partnership with Bosch of Farmington Hills, where Oakland County Michigan Works provides this Tier 1 automotive supplier with the funds for apprenticeship training. The program even purchased a bike for Arin to travel back-and-forth to work. A graduate of the apprenticeship program, Arin – a former banker – is now supporting technology for mobility solutions.

Both Asia and Arin are great examples of how Oakland County is nurturing new talent for our workforce pipeline.

Unfortunately, some of our residents are facing more dire conditions. They need access to safe and affordable housing.

Our Neighborhood and Housing Development leadership is working with the Board of Commissioners and our Treasurer Robert Wittenberg to create a new Housing Trust Fund. By providing gap funding to developers, we'll ensure our residents have safe and affordable

opportunities to rent or buy a home.

We're also expanding our Home Repair Project, that helps low- and moderate-income homeowners get the repairs they need to remain in their homes. This program keeps the county's neighborhoods thriving and is – quite frankly -- the right thing to do for our aging population.

Part of the strength of a community is that our residents have easy and secure access to the ballot box. I'd like to thank our county clerk and register of deeds Lisa Brown and all of our local clerks for their tireless efforts to run elections during a pandemic.

Green places-and-spaces also contribute to a quality life. Our 14 parks and 138-miles of trails provide everything from respite to recreation. They allow us to connect with nature and reconnect with ourselves. The voters of our county once again demonstrated their enthusiastic support by expanding the parks millage. Our parks system is vital to preserving our green space for future generations. Working in collaboration with local communities I hope to have 400 miles of Oakland County trails linking our parks, our communities and our region for all to enjoy.

In addition to trails, I remain committed to improving transit and mobility options throughout the county, as well. I'd like to acknowledge the new general manager of SMART – Dwight Ferrel – who is also with us tonight.

We can't have green spaces or healthy residents, however, without clean water. As part of our 5-year plan, the county will be measuring the number of lead service lines – those small pipes that connect buildings and homes to water mains. Today, we understand the harmful effects of lead in our drinking waters. So, it must be a priority for all levels of government to replace lead pipes with safer, sustainable materials. Working with the Board of Commissioners we started this effort by providing \$2.5 million in planning grant money to local communities. It's important to credit Water Resource Commissioner Jim Nash's leadership on this and other water-quality issues. Thank you, Jim

Oakland County is committed to responsibly using our resources, pursuing alternative energy, and investing in new technologies that are friendly to the environment. Our goal remains carbon

neutrality by 2050. We're starting with our own campus – and creating a path to increased energy efficiency.

I'm also excited to announce a new partnership with Oakland University to address a variety of environmental issues in our County. Not only is this good for the residents of Oakland County, but this partnership spotlights Oakland University as an elite regional research institution and a sustainability model for higher education.

Even this spectacular venue -- the M1 Concourse -- is the result of our county's commitment to the environment.

Starting in 1905, this site was home to vehicle manufacturing. General Motors built everything here from cars and buses to World War II vehicles before shuttering the facility in 2008. Thanks to the Oakland County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, 80 acres of contaminated land have been transformed into productive space.

Today, M1 Concourse is a place where enthusiasts can show off and enjoy their vehicles! The facility boasts a performance driving track and more than 250 garages.

It's another example of Oakland County All ways, moving forward.

One of the best parts of my job is meeting people – like school teachers, and entrepreneurs, parents and first responders. People coming from distant shores and those born within our county.

I'm proud of the differences we have, and the similarities we share. I'm glad that our county embraces diversity – in every conceivable way.

Embracing diversity means, in part, ensuring our programs and services are accessible to all County residents and businesses. It's our job to remove whatever barriers exist that keep us from delivering inclusive solutions.

In the last few weeks, I've hosted a number of "State of the County" preview meetings with different ethnic, religious, business and age groups. I value the perspective each person offers.

And while I appreciate public discourse as a way to better understand each other's point of view, we must do it in a way that is both respectful and kind.

Yes, I said kind. There is room for kindness and grace in government. We can be both passionate about our views and respectful. As leaders, I believe we must model the behavior that's desperately needed to repair the divide that exists in our country - welcoming our differences – but acting together to serve our communities.

Tonight, I've addressed the challenges we face and the plans we've made to keep Oakland County All ways, moving forward.

Reaching our goals will require a lot of work. But I'm optimistic, because I believe that we have the right resources and the right people for the job.

First, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. We work hand-in-hand with the Board, led by Chairman Dave Woodward and minority chair Mike Spisz. I couldn't ask for two better partners in government. Dave with his relentless ideas and determination, and Mike with his engineer brain and attention to detail. They represent their parties well, but they represent Oakland County even better.

Together, we've approved a budget that puts us on the path to true structural balance and critical expenditures of millions in COVID relief dollars, proving that bipartisanship is alive and well in Oakland County.

The rating agencies agreed -- last year reaffirming our coveted AAA bond rating.

Our administration has a reputation for fiscal responsibility through prudent management, balanced three-year budgets, and innovative services. Maintaining fiscal discipline and ensuring the county lives within its means is a fundamental principle of good government. So is transparency.

I am determined that we take the same approach to spending our American Rescue plan dollars. The county was awarded a total of \$244 million in relief funds. Some of those dollars

have already been spent on what we call acute needs – such as COVID vaccinations, worker assistance and mental health.

Now, we're shifting our focus to long-term investments. These new investments must focus on chronic problems – issues that have challenged the county for decades and have been compounded by the pandemic: Worker training and education. Support for young people and students. Care for the environment. Small business development. Health care.

The transformational possibilities linked to these funds are staggering. But we must be strategic and intentional, and partner to maximize this opportunity. I support initiatives that will leverage these funds with state and local priorities to make an even greater impact on our communities.

I am thankful to the Board of Commissioners, and my own leadership team – starting with:

- Hilarie Chambers, the Chief Deputy County Executive
- Our three deputy county executives: April Lynch, Rudy Hobbs and Sean Carlson
- And Robin Carter-Cooper, our Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion officer

I am most thankful to our more than 5,000 county employees. Each day these dedicated folks suit up and show up in service to the community. They are the connective tissue – linking our residents and businesses to endless opportunities to succeed.

Just before my speech tonight, I attended a reception to celebrate the Oakland Together 40 Under 40 Class of 2022. This is the tenth year we've honored young professionals who live or work in Oakland County and they exemplify the very best of who we are, and what we aspire to become.

This diverse group of individuals are leaders and entrepreneurs, activists and teachers –all passionate about their communities, successful in their careers and bound for great things in the future.

Among the class is an attorney, an assistant high school principal, a circuit court judge, a firefighter, an assistant professor, a public health consultant and a manager of supplier diversity.

Many of them are in the audience tonight. Class of 2022 -- please stand to be recognized.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the future of Oakland County.

With the power of these, and thousands of others in our communities who are committed to service, community, humility and inclusion, I am certain that we will keep Oakland County All ways, moving forward.

Thank you.