

Mayor Fischer – Resilience Speech Text with Slides

Miami, February 18, 2020

(SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE)

Thank you.

(Thank Otis and the Rockefeller Foundation)

(Acknowledge fellow mayors – reference any personal/USCM connections.)

(Ad lib reference to the day/ the city/ the physical space)

When we talk about resilience, one of my role models is a global icon who had strong ties to both of our communities.

The Champ – Muhammad Ali.

(SLIDE – ALI)

He grew up at 3302 Grand Avenue in Louisville.

And after he turned pro, he came to South Florida to train.

Lived near Charles Hadley Park on Northwest 46th Street.

Used to run from there – 6 miles – in combat boots and a sweat suit – over the bridge to his gym in Miami Beach.

That dedication to roadwork helped make him The Greatest.

That fierce determination helped him beat Sonny Liston

(SLIDE – ALI BEATS LISTON)

and “shake up the world” in the Miami Beach Convention Center and become heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

But Ali showed resilience outside of the ring, too. In 1984, he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. But he didn’t let that defeat him or send him into hiding. Instead, in 1996,

(SLIDE - ALI IN ATLANTA)

he stood before the whole world and created this unforgettable inspiring moment when he lit the Olympic flame.

That’s resilience.

Fighting to thrive, to love, to make the world a better place.

That's the quality we're trying to cultivate in our cities, in our residents and – in ourselves as community leaders.

(SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE)

The question is, how do we do that?

One of the first steps is understanding and being brutally honest about our threats, challenges and areas of greatest vulnerability.

For context, Louisville is a city of about 771,000 on the Ohio River.

Our overall economy is strong. We've added 83,000 jobs since 2011, opened 3,000 new businesses.

And since 2014, we've attracted more than \$15 billion in capital investment.

Demographically, we're about 67 percent white.

22 percent African American.

About 6 percent Latino.

More than 15 percent of our citizens live in poverty.

But we struggle with equitable results – one of our most troubling challenges is in life expectancy. There's more than 12 years difference in life expectancy between some of our neighborhoods, and that of course, is completely unacceptable.

This same reality plagues every city in our nation. The root causes and social determinants of health are the same – and we're working on all of them.

(SLIDE [no need to read this list]):

- *Neighborhood development*
- *Housing*
- *Transportation*
- *Criminal justice*
- *Early childhood development*
- *Education*
- *Built environment*
- *Environmental quality*
- *Food systems*
- *Employment and income*

Resilience is value driven work. Our core city values are lifelong learning, health and compassion.

SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE

And we define compassion as the work we do so that everyone's human potential can flourish.

I see compassion as essential to the work of leading a city, because creating a culture of compassion helps build our social muscles, the connections that hold our communities together in challenging times. The belief – and the reality – that we are all in it together!

And like every city, Louisville has experienced shocks and stresses.

For example, the 1937 Flood.

(SLIDE – FLOOD/DOWNTOWN)

This was one of the biggest floods in U.S. history. And it devastated whole sections of our community.

Two-thirds of the population had to be evacuated.

(SLIDE – FLOOD/TENT CITY)

And when the waters receded, the city changed.

Neighborhoods that had once been prosperous lost population and businesses.

It was the people with financial means who started moving away from the river. This contributed to white flight and the segregating of our neighborhoods.

Because of racist policies like redlining, our African American citizens were essentially restricted to living in less prosperous neighborhoods.

(SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE)

This is one of the consequences of a city that doesn't think of a bigger picture of resilience... or health... or equity. Or have a plan – a proactive strategy to produce positive outcomes in those areas.

Because we have to prepare for the immediate impact of a crisis, **as well as** the aftermath, which can be just as devastating if we're not ready.

Flooding is one of Louisville's biggest threats in terms of natural disasters.

Another is tornadoes.

(SLIDE – TORNADO)

In 1974, an F4 tornado touched down in Louisville, destroying homes and ripping up trees.

(SLIDE – NEIGHBORHOOD)

Another tornado that same strength hit the town of Henryville, Indiana, just north of us in 2012.

(SLIDE – HENRYVILLE)

It devastated this small city's downtown and killed 14 people.

A few elementary school students and teachers sheltered in their school as the tornado ripped away parts of the building around them.

If a tornado that strength hit our downtown corridor in Louisville, we could see casualties in the hundreds and a similar number of homes and businesses destroyed.

(SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE)

And we all know that the devastating impact of climate change has the potential to become much more severe if we do not prepare and change.

In my hometown, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a report in 2017 that makes it clear that because of climate change, the Ohio Valley should expect more severe weather in the coming years.

More floods, more droughts and the potential for more tornadoes.

So, we have to be ready.

We were honored that the Rockefeller Foundation named Louisville one of its 100 Resilient Cities in 2016.

That partnership has been incredibly valuable for our city because it helped us focus our existing efforts to create a more resilient community.

We created our resilience strategy in a two-year process beginning with convening 200 stakeholders who scanned the city's top potential shocks and stresses and brainstormed what we can do now to mitigate them.

We asked our community to weigh in. More than 1,700 people participated in workshops.

We did dozens of interviews. Surveyed hundreds of Louisvillians.

Held focus groups and public meetings. And listened to what the people of our city were telling us.

(SLIDE – SHOCKS AND STRESSES)

The community identified our shocks: inadequate government funding, riots/civil unrest, the substance use epidemic, economic crises, and infrastructure failure.

And our stresses: poverty, struggling schools, the decline of the natural and built environment, crime, violence and **one source of stress we heard over and over: inequity.**

(SLIDE – RESILIENT LOUISVILLE)

As we've all seen so often, it's our under-resourced and minority populations that tend to be the most at-risk and face excessive and unfair disadvantages.

This leads us to the inevitable conclusion that becoming more resilient is about more than preparing for a specific moment of crisis that is environmentally based.

It's about becoming a stronger, safer, more compassionate and **more equitable community** every day.

It's about becoming a community that cultivates human resiliency.

It's about becoming a community where people have access to basics like housing, health care, education, and job opportunities.

It's also about becoming a community where people feel hope and a sense of possibility about their lives, a sense of agency, and a connection to a hopeful future.

Hope, agency, possibility – these are the things that help sustain us through setbacks, that keep us fighting in tough times.

Some of those things we can cultivate through concrete steps like launching or investing in effective programs, or attracting businesses and jobs.

We also have to embrace the abstract elements of building resilience.

Some of this work is psychological and cultural.

It's about how people see themselves, their circumstances and their place in the community and the world.

And I feel like – and I know many of you feel this way as well – as a city leader, the most powerful aspect of my job is to use the pulpit of my office to constantly beat the drum and implement action that builds positive cultural change within my community.

That's why my team and I have made a point of talking about resilience, along with compassion and innovation and equity and other priorities in speeches and written communications for years.

We want the people and the organizations of Louisville to infuse these ideas into their self-concept and into their concept of who we are as a city.

And our partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation has given us additional opportunities and resources to focus, refine and accelerate our resilience work and efforts, and incorporate it into the story of our city's ongoing progress and plans.

Last June, we released our strategy for creating a more resilient Louisville. Our resilience plan is based on 4 visions we have for the people of our city, and it's the title of this speech:

(SLIDE – 4 VISIONS)

1. LEARN - Embrace Lifelong Learning
2. LIVE - Ensure a Safe + Healthy City
3. ENGAGE - Build a Vibrant Economy + Place
4. THRIVE - Maximize Innovation + Civic Engagement

From those four visions, we developed 10 goals and 46 actions.

(SLIDE – GOALS AND ACTIONS)

All of them follow the direction set by the voices of our residents, and they also align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This helps deepen our city's connection with the resilience movement that's happening across the globe and gives us data to benchmark our progress.

(SLIDE - RECT)

Part of our concept is that Resilience is driven by Equity, Compassion, and Trust (R=E+C+T).

I won't list all of our goals and actions for you right now. You're welcome to review our plan online at louisvilleky.gov/resilience

(Slide -URL)

To make all this work, our 46 actions are owned by our government agencies and our community partners, including businesses, non-profits and local and national foundations. For example...

- Our work to ensure that our students are ready to learn on Day One of kindergarten and have what they need to succeed in school and in life is overseen by Evolve 502. This is a non-profit coalition that's working to streamline our wraparound for students and families and establish a promise scholarship to college.
- We're working to attract investment to historically underserved neighborhoods, particularly in west Louisville.
- And we've seen nearly a billion dollars invested in this area of our city.
- We're working with Kenan Charitable Trust and others to **attract** investment there without **displacing** existing businesses and residents – creating partnerships with residents to build income and wealth within our African American community.
- Our economy is growing, but too many of our residents don't feel it yet and need access to skills training for 21st century careers.

- That's why part of a \$3 million grant we won from JPMorgan Chase is helping create Tech Louisville, an entry-level tech training initiative in specific low-income neighborhoods.
- Building greater trust and legitimacy between our police and the communities they serve is crucial to building resilience. That's one reason we launched the Synergy Project.
- The idea is simple: Create a safe space where police and residents can come together, respectfully address their differences, find similarities, and then work together on public safety solutions based on mutual respect.
- Another one of our goals is to encourage every Louisville resident to help others through volunteerism and service opportunities, like our annual Give a Day Week of Service, which breaks world records for participation every year. Last year, we recorded 235,000 volunteers and acts of compassion in one week.

- We're working to mitigate climate change impacts, expanding green infrastructure and spaces, and working with the non-profit TreesLouisville to grow our tree canopy, and working with the University of Louisville's Envirome Institute to study and create breakthroughs in the emerging field of environmental medicine.
- We just launched the first bus rapid transit system in our region. And our plans include improving and maintaining a stable, multimodal transportation system that ensures availability, accessibility and affordability.
- We're also working to address our aging wastewater, stormwater and flood protection infrastructure.

All of these efforts are in different stages of development. Some have been underway for a while, but we're now looking at everything we do through the lens of resilience.

Our efforts are led and coordinated by our Office of Performance Improvement.

And we also have established a resilience team, made up of a diverse group of internal agency representatives who are committed to the community and to creating a more resilient Louisville.

All of this work is built into the strategic plan of our city. Our resilience plan is not a plan in isolation. It is part of an integrated whole – the system of a city.

Those are the basics of our resilience story, which is ongoing and unfolding and evolving every day.

I appreciate the opportunity to share it with you, because while every city has its own distinct character, culture, history and set of challenges, we're all facing a future that's uncertain and unpredictable.

All we know for sure is that we're looking at a dramatic and accelerating pace of change – in our climate, in our society, in our technology and our economy.

But some things are certain for the people in each of our cities. There's a shared connection in this place we call home.

Where we have a shared history and a shared future. And it's within our power to build the resilience we need to face the challenges and the opportunities of the future – if we work together.

I'd like to close with one last thought about Ali. I got to know him in his later years.

(SLIDE – ALI)

I remember being at an event with him and his wife Lonnie once.

He was being honored and people had been talking about his accomplishments as an athlete, but more as a civil rights champion and as one of the world's great humanitarians.

When you think about it, it's staggering to think about all the things he did in just one lifetime.

And I asked him, "Champ, how'd you do all this? What's your secret?"

And speaking was a little hard for him sometimes at this stage with Parkinsons, so he motioned for me to come closer. I leaned in and he whispered, "Road work."

In my city.

In your cities.

And all over the world.

Muhammad put in the road work.

He was dedicated to achieving results.

And he became a champion.

Let's follow his example.

Let's put in the road work, every day.

And together, let's create the resilient cities that the people of all our hometowns deserve.

Thank you.

(SLIDE – URL)

(Take questions.)