

The Columbus Way



Scioto Mile in downtown Columbus during the Columbus Arts Festival

An Interview with
The Honorable Andrew Ginther, Mayor of Columbus, Ohio

EDITORS' NOTE Mayor Andrew Ginther was elected as the 53rd mayor of the City of Columbus after having served on the Columbus City Council from 2007 and as President of the Council from 2011 until assuming the Office of Mayor in January 2016. Mayor Ginther is a Columbus native and proud Columbus City Schools graduate, and he has a long history of community service. Prior to joining the Columbus City Council, he was elected to the Columbus Board of Education in 2001 and was re-elected in 2005. Mayor Ginther earned a B.A. in political science from Earlham College, studied abroad at the University of Ulster and Queen's College in Northern Ireland, and taught at public schools in Belfast and Derry. He also served in consecutive internships at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, where he taught non-violence and dispute resolution.



The Hon. Andrew Ginther

How do you define the strengths of Columbus and is Columbus well understood?

We are becoming better understood. We're reaching that critical mass of Fortune 500 companies and have a growing number of start-ups across all industries. CoverMyMeds and Root Insurance were our first unicorn start-ups. Both recently have been valued at a billion dollars or more, which we're very excited about. They were born and developed in Columbus, where 80 percent of our businesses are considered small businesses.

We have an excellent workforce and a high concentration of educational institutions – we have 136,000 students in undergraduate study in the region at any given point in time. Besides Ohio State, we also have Columbus State and many other institutions of higher learning throughout the region.

We're also located at the center of the most densely populated part of the country, so that means we have superior access to the North American consumer population.

Generally, we're within a 10-hour drive of 46 percent of the market in the U.S., so having a high number of corporate headquarters and a significant U.S. manufacturing capacity contribute to why Columbus is a great place to do business.

Will you discuss your focus on early-childhood education in Columbus?

I have always felt that the city should help keep a focus on kindergarten readiness – from birth to five. My vision is for Columbus to become a national leader in the birth to five space. This means better birth outcomes, reducing our infant mortality rates, having our youngest residents thriving in their first years of life, and starting kindergarten ready to learn. It also means supporting them with after-school and summer programs, and with internship opportunities and pathways to careers. I believe that's our role.

What was the vision for the Smart Columbus initiative and how has this effort progressed?

I'm a big believer that mobility is the great equalizer of the 21st century. If one has access to continuing education, living wage jobs, and things some might take for granted like fresh fruits and vegetables and healthcare, then one can have a great quality of life regardless of where they live.

We beat out 77 other great American cities in the Smart City Challenge. We started with a \$40 million award from USDOT and \$10 million from Paul G. Allen Philanthropies and, by the time we submitted the application, we already had \$90 million in local matching funds generated from institutions of higher education, corporations, and the city, county, and state. We have now leveraged that into \$600 million of spending on Smart Columbus aligned projects throughout the community with a goal of \$1 billion by 2020.

This has helped us dramatically increase mobility options and has even helped us tackle the issue of infant mortality by expanding access for expectant moms to prenatal assistant programs by providing access to doctor appointments and other resources they need in order to make sure their pregnancies go full-term and result in healthy babies.

Have your efforts around public safety been more about increasing law enforcement presence or is it a broader focus?

It's much broader. We developed a comprehensive neighborhood safety strategy after a series of roundtables around the community.

We had a record number of homicides in 2017 and I knew that we could not police our way out of it. We know that public safety is everyone's responsibility, so having the involvement of the Departments of Health and Recreation and

Parks and Development is important – it's not just the Division of Police's job. All of us have a role to play.

We're seeing some signs of success with a 28 percent reduction in homicides in 2018 and a reduction in violent crime in all categories.

We made it clear from the beginning that we didn't just want more police; we wanted to police differently. This strategy will allow us to do that.

How critical is public/private partnership in addressing the issues that Columbus is facing?

It is critical. We talk about the "Columbus Way" and we think we do public/private partnerships better than anywhere in America. We leverage the public/private partnership – it worked for downtown revitalization, for our riverfront redevelopment and for economic development. We also leverage those partnerships with Smart Columbus.

We have a comprehensive community-wide plan focusing on safety, health and development that we are implementing in partnership with the private sector. We're leveraging public/private partnerships to invest in and help transform the lives of people in one of the most challenged areas of Columbus.

Celebrate One is our infant mortality reduction effort that I launched when I was Council President and we have continued to gain momentum on that and seen a reduction of infant mortality in the community.

Leveraging public/private partnerships has made all the difference in these areas.

With all of the gridlock in Washington, is it at the state and city level where real progress is being made?

That is definitely the case at the city level. It is a very different spirit on the local level. Most people run for mayor to get things done and help empower people to improve their own lives.

What makes Columbus unique is the people of Columbus, two-thirds of whom are doing better than they have ever done before, but that is still not enough for them.

They know that one-third of their neighbors have been left out of the Columbus success story and they want to advance them into the winner's circle. They want mixed-income neighborhoods and a place with folks from all walks of life to be able to age in place in their neighborhoods.

We believe that now is the time for us to chart a course for not just dynamic growth, but also inclusive growth, and that is what generates the excitement that is so wonderful about leading the city right now. ●