

Building a Stronger Athens: Mayor Patterson's Vision for Progress and Community

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Since 2016, Mayor Steve Patterson has been at the helm of Athens, Ohio, leading the city through an era of remarkable growth, transformation, and resilience. His decision to run for office was rooted in a clear vision: to seize opportunities to improve the city and strengthen its relationship with Ohio University. Over his tenure, Mayor Patterson has not only seen his vision come to life but has also become a powerful advocate for collaboration and progress across Appalachian

Ohio.

Under Mayor Patterson's leadership, Athens has secured over \$16 million in external funding for critical infrastructure projects that have reshaped the city. From the Stimson Avenue roundabout to the Richland Avenue pedestrian passageway and the newly completed fire station headquarters, these projects have been a testament to the city's strong partnerships with Ohio University. "The university has been a key partner in many of these efforts," Patterson noted, highlighting how collaboration transformed a rail bed into 1804 Way and created new gateways into the university.

But the mayor's work is not just about improving infrastructure. Patterson has championed sustainability initiatives, including the development of a 2.1-megawatt solar array, which has helped reduce Athens' carbon footprint and lower energy costs for the city. With over \$6 million in additional funding secured for projects like the 682-56 roundabout, Athens is poised to continue its journey toward more efficient infrastructure.

Beyond the city limits, Mayor Patterson has made a significant impact on the regional and national stage. He serves as president of the National League of Cities, a role that amplifies Athens' voice in national conversations. He's also an active member of the Ohio Mayors Alliance and the Ohio Municipal League, representing Athens and advocating for Appalachian Ohio. Despite these high-profile roles, Patterson remains deeply connected to his roots in the Mayors' Partnership for Progress (MPP), an organization he credits as the foundation of his success.

The Mayors' Partnership for Progress: Strength in Collaboration

Mayor Patterson's involvement with the MPP began before he officially took office. Introduced to the organization by his predecessor, Patterson found the partnership to be a vital resource. "Athens has always shown up," Patterson said, reflecting on the city's long-standing

commitment to the network. Through the MPP, he's built strong relationships with other mayors, sharing strategies and solutions to common challenges.

"The camaraderie is incredible," Patterson shared. "Whether you're a newly elected mayor or have years of experience, the MPP provides a space to learn, collaborate, and support each other." This collaboration was particularly impactful during the COVID-19 pandemic, as mayors leaned on one another to navigate unprecedented challenges.

The MPP's collective strength has also bolstered advocacy efforts. By working together, the partnership has built strong relationships with the Governor's Office of Appalachia and other key organizations, ensuring that the needs of the MPP's 25 counties footprint are heard.

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Athens

Mayor Patterson envisions a future where Athens continues to work toward sustainability and economic growth. He's committed to reducing carbon emissions, improving walkability and bikeability, and expanding the city's transit system. Patterson also emphasizes the importance of diversifying Athens' economic portfolio to create a stronger, more independent community.

"We've grown alongside Ohio University, and while that partnership remains vital, we need to build an economic base that stands on its own," Patterson explained. By attracting new businesses and creating jobs, Patterson aims to strengthen Athens' community fabric while maintaining its unique character.

Equally important to Patterson is inspiring the next generation of leaders. "We need to elevate underserved communities, encourage future leaders, and build international relationships," he said. His advice to aspiring leaders? "You're serving your community. It's not about money or ego—it's about being your community's strongest cheerleader."

As Mayor Patterson continues to lead Athens into the future, his dedication to collaboration and community remains unwavering—a legacy of progress and promise for years to come.