

Lexington- Fayette Urban County Government Council Meeting

State of the Merged Government Address

January 22, 2019

The Council of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Kentucky convened in regular session on January 22, 2019 at 11:30 a.m. Present were Mayor Gorton in the chair presiding, and the following members of the council: Kay, Moloney, Ellinger, J. Brown, McCurn, Gibbs, Lamb, Farmer, Evans, Worley, F. Brown, Mossotti, Bledsoe, Reynolds, and Plomin.

\*

\*

\*

The Mayor gave her State of the Merged Government Address as follows:

Good afternoon and thank you, thank you to the Lexington Forum and Forum President Fausto Sarmiento, for again hosting today's annual State of the City / State of the County speech.

Wow. 17 days and counting. 17 days as Mayor, and I've enjoyed every one of them.

We're just getting started, but I've already discovered I really like being Mayor, and I suspect it's for the same reason I like being a registered nurse: There's something different happening every day, sometimes every minute.

Today, I'm going to talk about the progress that's been made over the past year in some city programs, and touch on a few new ideas we're working on.

This is my first State of the Merged Government Speech. As you may know, that's its official name in our City's Charter. In recent years, we've been calling it the State of the City speech. I want to tweak that a little bit. I'm calling it our State of the City/State of the County speech. Despite 45 years of merged government, today urban life in Lexington and rural life in Lexington are still very different, with different priorities. In this speech, I want to recognize all

parts of our community, just as the Council recognizes and represents all parts of our community, urban, suburban and rural areas.

The members of our Urban County Council have been, and will be, my partners in our work together. Please stand, each of you, as I recognize you: Vice Mayor Steve Kay, Council member-at-Large Richard Moloney, Council member-at-Large Chuck Ellinger, 1st District Councilmember James Brown, 2<sup>nd</sup> District Josh McCurn, 3rd District Jake Gibbs, 4<sup>th</sup> District Susan Lamb, 5<sup>th</sup> District Bill Farmer, Jr., 6<sup>th</sup> District Angela Evans, 7<sup>th</sup> District Preston Worley, 8<sup>th</sup> District Fred Brown, 9<sup>th</sup> District Jennifer Mossotti, 10<sup>th</sup> District Amanda Mays Bledsoe, 11<sup>th</sup> District Jennifer Reynolds, and 12th District Councilmember Kathy Plomin.

I know our Councilmembers want the best for our City, and so do our citizens. We know our citizens want us to dream big dreams for Lexington so let's talk about a few of those dreams, big and small, we've been working on in my first couple of weeks in office

I want to start with the battle against opioid addiction.

Now, that might not sound like a big dream to some people, but to the thousands of people who have lost a family member or friend or colleague to an overdose, or tried to help someone battle addiction, there is no bigger dream than finding effective ways to help addicts and their families fight back. It is literally a matter of life and death, and it affects everyone, all demographics. It touches our businesses, schools, churches, families, everyone. It's detrimental to our labor force, diverts funding from much needed initiatives, and has stolen the future from many talented Lexingtonians.

These days, everywhere I go, I hear another tragic story about addiction. Last week, 800 people filled up the Kentucky Theatre on a cold Wednesday evening to hear a program and watch a movie about opioid addiction. Several people came up to me at the Kentucky to

tell me about the people they had lost to an overdose. People are desperate for help and hope. And it is time we make this a community priority.

I have dedicated a staff member in the Mayor's Office, Andrea James, to focus exclusively on this issue. She is working deliberately to research Fayette County's data and status relative to addiction and overdose. We know we are the number 2 county in the Commonwealth, only behind Jefferson County in the severity of our problem. Andrea will find the best experts and best practices nationwide. She will also reach out to partners the people in the trenches who fight this battle every day right here in Lexington.

She is going to take a look at the programs now in place, for example:

- Social Services Commissioner Chris Ford and his team have gathered considerable data working with the University of Kentucky College of Medicine to identify strengths and unmet needs of our response to opioid addiction.
- Lexington has won a \$2 million grant for overdose prevention to support first responders and community partners, expanding the availability of naloxone, among other initiatives.
- In Fayette County, police officers, firefighters, and Sheriff's deputies now carry naloxone
- And our health department operates a very successful needle exchange program, as well as providing naloxone to citizens.

After gathering the available information, I will assemble a multi-disciplinary work group that will craft a comprehensive action plan for Lexington. We have no time to waste. We have to address this now.

Another focus of mine these first days in office has been the economy. Jobs, jobs, jobs. Economic development will always be a top priority for City Hall.

Our city's big dreams investments we want to make are fueled by economic growth a growing economy and new jobs enable the city to afford quality of life investments, which in turn attract new companies that place a high premium on quality of life to Lexington.

Now, talk about the economy always brings up questions about our City's budget, so let's pause just a moment to talk about where we stand. We are looking at a very tight budget next fiscal year, with many funding challenges ahead of us, especially rising pension costs. Like last year, the ongoing uncertainty in Frankfort leaves us and other Kentucky cities with questions about how much our pension costs will rise what size impact there will be on our budgets.

Over the next few weeks, Chief of Staff Tyler Scott, my team, and I will be making some tough decisions about our budget, and those decisions will be presented to the public April 9th, when I give my first budget address to the Council. Our budget process is already underway. It will be managed by Chief Administrative Officer Sally Hamilton, who will lead our strong budget team, which this year will include John Cubine, an expert in government finance.

Our current budget may be tight, but I'm very optimistic about the future of our economy. Two recent initiatives give us the opportunity for significant economic growth. We must put strong plans in place to take full advantage of them, and our Chief Development Officer Kevin Atkins is already working on these plans.

First, Lexington is well on its way to being one of the largest gigabit cities in the country. A \$10 million fiber optic network, MetroNet, is already being installed downtown and in our suburbs.

Welcome to MetroNet's John Cinelli, Kevin Stelmach and Kathy Scheller, who have joined us today. And thanks to our CIO, Aldona Valicenti, who has been working closely with them.

As the work to install the network has progressed, MetroNet has also partnered with Lexington Traditional Magnet School and other organizations to address our digital divide. Thank you.

MetroNet provides us with the opportunity to leap into tomorrow's economy. To become a technological hub we must capitalize on this opportunity.

That means an aggressive economic development campaign to attract new high tech companies, and help Lexington companies as they grow and expand. We want a large share of the hundreds of students who graduate from our city's universities to find a good job right here. Technology jobs are a natural fit for many of them.

Second, there's the partnership we recently entered into with the University of Kentucky, our city's largest employer. It's another reason I'm optimistic about future economic growth.

Last year, in exchange for ownership of some sections of streets near campus, UK gave the city 250 acres for economic development. There are 50 shovel-ready acres in Coldstream Research campus, and another 200 acres fronting on I-75. We must have a strong development plan for the Coldstream property. Our Industrial Development Authority has been appointed, and will begin meeting soon to put together a plan for this 250 acres. This board will make sure that the land is ready to attract employment that Lexington can be proud of, good stable jobs, jobs of the future.

We also have the potential for significant economic growth in the field of high tech agriculture. We are well positioned to be a national leader in this field. And we've already started working on it.

In Fayette County today, agriculture is a \$2.3 billion business, according to a 2017 study by a UK economist. We can increase that, while providing more good-paying jobs for our citizens.

I want to thank Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles and his staff at the Kentucky Department of Agriculture for their willingness to partner with us in this effort. We are also working with Alltech, a company that has been a pioneer in high tech agriculture. Founded by the late Dr. Pearse Lyons, the company today is led by his son, Dr. Mark Lyons, who is working with us. And, we have the support of Dean Nancy Cox and her faculty, staff and graduates at the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

Dr. Ashton Potter Wright started as our region's Local Food Coordinator. I have asked her to broaden her scope, and work with this group. And just a word about Ashton's work over her first 4 years with the city. Through Bluegrass Farm to Table she has established relationships with over 80 farmers in 30 counties, generating over \$2.5 million in sales for small and medium size farming operations.

Workforce development is an essential part of any type of successful economic development. I'm excited about the partnership we have recently formed with our global headquarter companies. After an initial conversation with Valvoline about its need for additional executive-level talent, a group of our companies with local global headquarters began meeting together. Elodie Dickinson, our Workforce Development Manager, is working with this group. The goal is to make sure we have the tools in place needed to attract the top talent to our companies.

I had the opportunity to meet with this group last Friday, and they continue to be engaged in making sure Lexington is seen for what it is a great place for business, a great place to live and work.

We are ready to attract the best of the best. Many of you may have seen the group's "Lexington, it just feels like home" video that was released near the end of last year. This video has had over 7,000 views, including people from 39 states, and 52 countries.

Thanks to Dennis Lawrence, President and CEO of Clark Material Handling, who is with us today. Dennis and Clark allowed the group to work with his videographer on the video, greatly reducing the overall cost.

From executive-level talent, to entry jobs, Lexington's workforce development must focus on local needs, the needs of our employers and workers. In the last three years, 400 people have gone through training programs funded by the city workforce grants, and we're just getting started. I have already met with and had conversations with Secretary Derrick Ramsey, of the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. Secretary Ramsey looks forward to working with us to grow our workforce development, especially in our efforts to provide apprenticeship opportunities.

Quality of life is often the reason companies are interested in locating in Lexington. One important part of quality of life is public safety Lexington is one of the safest cities of its size in the country.

In 2018 we had the lowest Part One crime rate that we've had in the past 6 years. These are serious crimes, like murder, rape, or robbery. Lexington had a 16% decrease in Part One Crimes in 2018 when compared to 2017. Our Violent Crime rate dropped over 13% in 2018 when compared to 2017, along with a 23% reduction in assaults with a firearm, and a 21% drop in murders. Thanks to Chief Lawrence Weathers and our police officers.

While we can be happy that our overall numbers are declining, we know there's more work to do. Those who have been personally affected by violence in our city often look at different sets of numbers. The homeowner who was a victim of a drive-by shooting may count the number of bullet holes in their home or their car. Families that have lost a loved one may think of the number of birthdays and holidays their loved ones will miss. As your Mayor, all of these numbers all of these people are important to me, which is why I support, and hope to expand, the work of ONE Lexington.

Under the leadership of Laura Hatfield, ONE Lexington works with people and organizations across the community, and with first responders to address violence, especially the involvement of young people in violence. Violence among young people has also been a top concern of our Superintendent and School Board.

I want to thank Superintendent Manny Caulk and our school board. Three board members are here today, Chair Stephanie Spires, and members Raymond Daniels, and Daryl Love welcome to all of you. We want to build on the work our police officers already do with you, and find new ways to collaborate to support your determination to keep our schools safe. That is important to all of us.

I also want to talk about the amazing work Chief Kristin Chilton and our Firefighters do to keep us safe. First, Fire Station 24 will open this summer in the Masterson Station area.

In addition to improving response times in the neighborhoods that surround it, Station 24 will house the Department's first tanker truck, which will allow us to better serve the rural community because it holds 3,000 gallons of water, the equivalent of three regular fire engines.

Second, our new Community Paramedicine program enables firefighters to take a more comprehensive approach to the care of patients who frequently call E-911 for assistance with chronic concerns, such as mobility issues or transportation. Instead of just solving a patient's immediate medical problem, through Community Paramedicine firefighters treat root problems.

Since it started in late 2017, Community Paramedicine has helped the department cut back the number of emergency care runs by 2.5 percent, or about 1,000 runs. The



program has reversed a recent trend, in which the number of runs had been increasing by about 8 percent each year.

Alice White, one of the people Community Paramedicine has helped, is here today. Alice was making frequent calls to 9-1-1 after she began experiencing what she thought was anxiety. The community paramedicine firefighters who examined her discovered she actually had an undiagnosed heart arrhythmia, which was causing her discomfort. Since Alice saw a cardiologist, who treated her arrhythmia, she has only had to call 9-1-1 once. It's a win, win. Alice's quality of life is better, and our firefighters are able to improve efficiency. Alice, we're so glad you're feeling better.

And, finally, our firefighters have saved lives (three and counting) through their new smoke alarm program. Lexington Firefighters installed 5,344 smoke alarms in 2018. One of them was at the home of Cassie Belle, a single mom with two teenagers living at home. Last month, her cats knocked over a toaster in her kitchen, and started a small fire. Cassie woke up at 2 a.m. to the sound of her smoke alarms. The alarms saved her life, and the lives of her children, she said. Cassie, we're glad you're here.

Most city employees aren't involved in saving lives, but their work is important, and makes an enormous contribution to quality of life here in Lexington. I want to mention a few of their accomplishments, and some of our upcoming plans:

#### In Engineering:

- Next year we will see additions to several trails, including Brighton East and Town Branch Trail;
- The connection of Citation Boulevard to Winburn Drive;
- The start of the next phase of Clays Mill Road improvements, from Waco Drive to Harrodsburg;
- The extension of Polo Club Boulevard to Todds Road;
- And the completion of the Wilson Downing Bridge.

#### In Traffic Engineering:

- Signal retiming projects for the Hamburg area and Nicholasville Road are coming later this year. They will make lights more responsive to changing traffic demands.

#### In Water Quality:

- Acting Commissioner of Public Works and Environmental Quality Charles Martin and his staff continue the work of cleaning up our streams by rebuilding our aging sanitary sewers. They are also saving money currently our actual expenses are running almost \$95 million below projections.

#### In Parks and Recreation:

- A new playground is coming to Shillito Park. Commissioner Geoff Reed has made accessibility a priority in our playgrounds, and other parks facilities.
- Veterans Park will also have a new playground.
- New trails are coming to Meadowthorpe and Dixie Parks.
- A new basketball court at Jacobson.
- New tennis courts at Coolavin, through a partnership with Transylvania University.
- And we are making two dog parks accessible.

#### In Information Technology:

- We have an upgraded system at LexCall 3-1-1 to provide better feedback, be more accountable, to citizens. Here's Traci Holman, a member of our Lexcall staff.

#### In Planning:

- A citizens task force will soon begin working to improve long-term land use decisions concerning the Urban Service Area boundary. We must have a data-driven process that guides any future expansion so we don't lose sight of the importance of infill.

As you can see, we've been busy and there's a lot more to come.

- First, you will see us reaching out to neighborhoods. Craig Cammack, the Community Outreach Liaison in my office, will be improving our communication with our neighborhoods, meeting with them, and helping them find what they need at City Hall. He will also work with LGBTQ groups, veterans and schools.

- Heather Lyons, my new director of Arts and Cultural Affairs, will bring new life and ideas to our downtown festivals, and build on the success of our lively arts and cultural community.
- Quin Welch, our “utility infielder,” will work on a variety of projects.
- We will continue to work on Town Branch Commons, a reinvented Rupp Arena, and a new Convention Center, where construction has begun.
- We will be focusing again on a new City Hall. Just this morning I came in to find a first floor meeting room I use frequently had been the victim of a leaking pipe over the weekend;
- Preparing for the return of the Breeders’ Cup in 2020;
- Building new partnerships with our public schools and universities;
- Looking at new ways to address violence;
- Recruiting world class companies; and more.

Many opportunities are missed because they come dressed in overalls and look like work. In Lexington, we’re not afraid of work, and we don’t miss opportunities for our City.

Thank you

The Council adjourned at 12:16 p.m.

---

Clerk of the Urban County Council