

Lexington- Fayette Urban County Government Council Meeting

Lexington, Kentucky January 29, 2026

The Council of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Kentucky convened in regular session on January 29, 2026 at 12:11 p.m. Present were Mayor Gorton in the chair presiding, and the following members of the Council: Boone, Brown, Curtis, Ellinger, Elliott Baxter, Hale, Higgins-Hord, Lynch, Morton, Reynolds, Sevigny, Sheehan, Wu, and Beasley.

*

*

*

The Mayor's State of the City-County Address was as follows:

Hello, everyone, and welcome! Come on in from the cold!

Thank you to the Lexington Forum for again hosting my State of the City-County speech. I want to recognize Forum President Robin McGuffin, and all Forum members for their outstanding service to Lexington. Congratulations to the Forum's award-winners!

Welcome to all public officials here today. Let's begin with an introduction of our Urban County Councilmembers. Please hold your applause until I introduce all of our Councilmembers. Councilmembers, please stand as I say your name:

Vice Mayor, Dan Wu, Councilmember-at-large James Brown, Councilmember-at-large Chuck Ellinger, First District Tyler Morton, Second District Shayla Lynch, Fourth District Emma Curtis, Fifth District Liz Sheehan, Sixth District Lisa Higgins-Hord, Seventh District Joseph Hale, Eighth District Amy Beasley, Ninth District Whitney Baxter, Tenth District Dave Sevigny, Eleventh District Jennifer Reynolds, and Twelfth District Hilary Boone. Thanks for all you do!

There's another important group I want to recognize, the team that helps me run our government: Sally Hamilton, my Chief Administrative Officer; Tyler Scott, my Chief of Staff; and my senior leadership team.

I also honor the nearly 3,000 employees who work for our government. You all make progress happen for Lexington and its residents every day! And, as always, I am grateful that my husband, Charlie, is here today – he has been my sidekick for life!

First, I want to share with you some unedited footage from a video I shot last year. Hope you'll enjoy this blooper! The finished video is shown at the airport to welcome visitors to our city. We don't generally air the part I'm going to show you.

I'm sure you are aware that there are special opportunities, and special challenges, that come with being Mayor of the Horse Capital of the World. One of those opportunities is that I have lunch with all kinds of people, including all of you today. However, every now and then, I get to *be* lunch...

*

*

*

Thank you to these residents of Darby Dan Farm, one of many world-class thoroughbred farms that make their home here.

As you know, people come here from all over the world to see our equine country; Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards just named Lexington the number one most tourist-friendly city in America. What's a little nibbling between friends!

Today we're turning a page in our community's weighty history book. 2025, a year in which we marked our 250th anniversary, is behind us; 2026, number 251, has begun.

Our historic 250Lex celebration was a year-long affair, dedicated to what makes Lexington great. Thousands joined in, with events in every corner of our community! With the dawn of 251, it's time to redouble our focus on the future.

We know the future is now. And we know that progress doesn't just happen. So we continuously lay the groundwork for it. As I talk today about the changes we've made over the past year, I want you to know that we're again ready to launch some exciting new initiatives! This starts with a discussion of our economy, and the investments for future success we are making in it.

First, where do things stand? The good news continues – our economy remains strong. Over the past year, we set a record for the highest employment in our history. Currently, there are 171,656 employed in Fayette County. While our cost of living remains relatively low, per capita income and median household income continue to climb.

To make sure those numbers continue to grow, economic development remains a top priority for me. As I start my eighth year as Mayor, it continues to be something I work on every day to secure a bright future for our children, and their children.

For example, we have invested in two new industrial parks: the Legacy Business Park and the new public regional industrial park in Berea, also involving Madison and Scott counties, along with Lexington-Fayette County. Construction on Legacy Business Park – the City’s newest light industrial park – began last June, and will be completed later this year.

We got the deed to this property in 2022, and broke ground in 2025, a quick turnaround. We are investing \$22.6 million in infrastructure to make the 200-acre park on Georgetown Road shovel-ready for businesses. Our up-front costs are fully funded - the park will open debt free. This park will include 19 lots, totaling 147 acres for development. We estimate Legacy will be home to nearly 1,700 jobs, with an annual payroll of \$100 million.

In addition, I recently helped initiate and joined the City of Berea, and Madison and Scott County fiscal courts to create the Central Kentucky Business Park Authority, which has purchased, and will manage Central Kentucky’s first public regional business park. It’s a goal we have actively worked toward for several years. I have been building strong partnerships with Bluegrass leaders so that we could begin working together on regional economic development.

Now, along with our friends in Madison and Scott counties - who I began meeting with my first year as Mayor - we’re doing it! Based in Berea, this economic development project, a 300-acre industrial park, will provide good jobs, and tax revenue that will allow governments in Berea and in all three counties to make improvements. Site planning is actively underway. Again, because of the relationships we have built, I am hopeful that the future will bring more regional projects. The future is now.

The same is true for an initiative to build jobs for the future in AgTech through the Bluegrass AgTech Development Corp partnership. The partnership is bringing promising new ag-tech businesses to Lexington, and to our state. Agriculture already contributes \$2.6 billion to the Fayette County economy every year. By making our community a national hub for AgTech businesses, we will grow that number. So far, Bluegrass AgTech has awarded Challenge Grants to 10 startups, with a third round of grants to be awarded this summer. The companies have used the \$925,000 invested by Bluegrass AgTech to leverage close to \$7.4 million in additional funding - an eight-to-one return on investment.

These grants are having a significant impact on our businesses and farms now. The start-up companies, which employ 67 people, have already spent \$620,000 to buy crops from our farmers, processing their crops into new products.

In another innovative project, we continue to explore solar energy and its potential for Lexington through the possible installation of a solar farm on the Haley Pike landfill, a step toward reducing our carbon footprint. Negotiations continue with Social Impact Solar LLC, a local company interested in leasing the property.

This past year, Lexington won a gold designation from SolSmart, which recognizes communities across the country that seek to increase renewable energy options. In economic development, we work to grow and attract all kinds of jobs to meet the needs of residents at various skill levels.

That is also the focus of our workforce development program, which helps some residents find a first job through classes in essential employment skills, and prepares others for a better job through more advanced training.

All of our training keeps in mind the needs of local employers. In fact, our employers visit our new Davis Park Workforce Center and meet with prospective employees. The center served over 400 people in 2025, its first year of operation. Eight WORK-Lexington partners provide job training for the city. Between July 2024 and June 2025, these partners trained, then helped over 1,600 people find employment. Finally, our Second Chance Academy offers job training inside our jail to inmates whose sentences are coming to an end. In 2025, 71 inmates completed the training.

Let's talk about our public safety team: our police department, fire department, community corrections, E-911, and emergency management.

In recent years, investments we have made in technology have transformed several of these divisions. That's especially true of our police department - violent crime is trending down in our community, in part, because of technology-intensive, precision-based, and intelligence-led policing. Acting as a police force multiplier, technology boosts efficiency, allows for expanded data analysis, and improves officer safety.

Our Real Time Intelligence Center has had a significant impact on solving crime, with additional specialists hired this year to expand operating hours. The overall numbers tell the story. Between 2024 and 2025:

- Violent crime dropped 10.8 percent, including:
 - Homicides, down 13%,
 - Assaults with firearms, down 23%, and
 - Robbery, down 26%.
- Overall, crimes against property dropped 8.7% between 2024 and 2025, including:
 - Motor vehicle thefts, down 15.7%. We have made progress!

Last year, we also expanded evidence testing through the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, which compares ballistic evidence gathered across the country to generate investigative leads in violent crimes involving firearms. That, coupled with our local investment to expand DNA testing, led to the closure of a 27-year-old cold case this year, the murder of Linda Rutledge, at last providing closure for her family. The future is now.

Technology changes are bringing faster response times to the Fire Department. A new alerting system installed last year – a \$1 million investment - allows for better integration with E-9-1-1. It also features electronic dispatch, freeing dispatchers from verbally dispatching each run, and speeding up the all-important dispatch times. The system has built-in back-up, an important layer of protection for the public.

Increased public protection is also the goal of a new program the fire department launched last June with the Kentucky Blood Center. It's already saving lives. Lexington ambulances now have access to whole blood to perform transfusions at the scene, improving patient survival rates. Our firefighters have already administered blood over 20 times. As a registered nurse I understand how this is an enormous step forward. This blood transfusion program again sets our firefighters apart – only 1-2% of emergency medical services nationwide perform such transfusions.

Another step forward: our Community Paramedicine team expanded in 2025 with the addition of a Crisis Response Team, building on an already unique, multidisciplinary approach that includes firefighters, paramedics, law enforcement, social workers, and counselors.

This expansion further positions our city at the forefront of community paramedicine, and mobile integrated health.

E-9-1-1 technology is vital to public safety. In 2025, we upgraded that technology to allow transmission of texts, photos, videos, and other location data. The change improves emergency response, making it faster and more effective.

The Division of Emergency Management also upgraded its technology, including the Mass Notification system that is the backbone of LexAlerts, Lexington's free emergency and public notification system. The new systems provide multi-language capabilities. In addition, they represent a savings of over \$100,000 a year.

Finally, in public safety, our Division of Community Corrections has made significant progress in how our community cares for individuals with serious behavioral health needs in our detention center.

Lexington established a dedicated Behavioral Health Unit. This unit is designed for rehabilitation and re-entry, serving some of the most at-risk individuals in our system, and preparing them to return to the community, healthier, safer, and more stable. Every Corrections recruit now completes crisis intervention training prior to graduation, ensuring officers can recognize mental health crises early. Officers assigned to the Behavioral Health Unit receive advanced mental health training. This level of preparation is uncommon in corrections nationally and earned our corrections officers recognition from local mental health advocates. Since the unit opened last March:

- Negative behavioral incidents have declined by 75 percent.
- More than 20% of participants have transitioned directly into community-based treatment upon release.

By the way, our detention center is very close to being fully staffed. In February 2023, staffing vacancies were at an all-time high of 133. Currently, we have 11 vacancies, and we're hoping to reach full staffing in February. That's progress! Congratulations, Chief Colvin, and everyone at Community Corrections.

We make direct investments in the future every day as we work with our community's young people. Our essential programs help young people whose lives have been torn apart by gun violence, unstable homes, substance use disorder, poverty, and more. Literally, their future is now. One Lexington works with partners throughout the community to keep our young people, ages 10-29, away from gun violence.

The One Lexington approach, with support from public safety and community partners, is working. In 2025, Lexington experienced its fourth consecutive year of declining gun violence. Last year, Lexington recorded the fewest total homicides of young people in a decade, and the fewest gunshot victims since 2010. The city has reduced violence involving young people by 60% since 2021.

In 2025, the city invested nearly \$200,000 in violence prevention efforts through grants to nonprofits and the school system. Our Department of Social Services is a vital part of this effort. Our Youth Services social workers and juvenile probation officers work hand in hand with the school system and the courts to support children who are caught up in the judicial system. Our goal is to ensure these children get the support services they need, can continue their education, and receive appropriate monitoring and supervision.

Another part of our government, Parks and Recreation, plays an essential role in youth development, through all kinds of sports programs, outdoor play, arts and culture activities, and more.

In many ways, 2025 was a banner year for our Parks. Thanks to federal American Rescue Act funding and local dollars, we were able to invest over \$29 million in significant parks projects all over town. In addition, we upgraded many of our playgrounds, equipment, trails, and sports courts.

The bigger projects we completed include the opening of Cardinal Run North, the first large regional park our community has opened in 25 years; the opening of Kelley's Landing, providing Lexington's first public access to the river; the reopening of Douglass Aquatic Center, with a new pool and pool house; and the reinvention of Phoenix Park downtown, which opened this fall to rave reviews.

Affordable housing is an essential investment in the future of many families, and our community. We currently have 231 units under construction. Most will provide needed units for seniors ages 55 and over. Once these units are complete, our growing portfolio will total 3,826 units preserved or constructed. We hope to top 4,000 units by the end of the year. Including a \$5 million investment last year, we have invested 60 million in public dollars to leverage a \$490 million investment by the private sector since the program began in 2014.

We've made solid progress in affordable housing. Building affordable housing is one of many ways we work to reduce the number of people in our community who are experiencing homelessness.

In 2025, we again offered a winter shelter service to meet seasonal needs. We increased outreach downtown to quickly respond to concerns, and to engage individuals in need of assistance. And I formed the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, which is focused on identifying strategies, resources, and solutions to better serve Lexington's homeless population.

Since 2020, we have spent \$50 million to address homelessness. Even so, like many other cities across our nation, we saw an increase in the number of unhoused people in Lexington last year. I have asked this Task Force to examine best practices in other cities, looking for new, creative approaches.

Naturally, our Planning and Preservation Department is focused on the future, helping us make good land use decisions, planning for growth, and working to provide a greater supply of housing to meet all needs. Over the past year, planning has standardized and accelerated the development approval process, including online applications. A complete development plan can now be approved within 30 days.

That word "complete" is important – approval can be delayed because all of the required pieces are not in place. However, we have sped up this process. Planning also developed the Lexington Preservation and Growth Management Program to ensure Lexington can provide for its future housing needs, while preserving Fayette County's unmatched farmland.

Preserving our farmland is the focus of Planning's Purchase of Development Rights program. In 2025, I recommended, and the Council adopted, a successful Small Farm Programs to serve farms with 10 to 19.9 acres. Since 2000, the Purchase of Development Rights program has preserved over 33,000 acres (304 farms) for continued farming, in perpetuity. Planning is also involved in improving street safety through the Vision Zero initiative, and Complete Streets planning.

Finally, today, I want to talk about investments we make to maintain our hometown. I'm talking about the basic building blocks of our community: roads, traffic signals, snow removal, sewers, sidewalks, recycling and trails.

Here are a few highlights. In 2025 we:

- Closed gaps in sidewalks on Squires Road and Wilson Downing.
- Added to Brighton Trail by connecting Liberty Park.
- Upgraded the area around Gatton Park, the privately funded destination park that opened this year downtown, with drainage improvements, a tunnel for access, and landscaping.
- Performed basic road maintenance, pruning trees, cutting back brush and fixing potholes: 8,979 of them!
- Invested an additional \$2 million in snow removal equipment and contracts.
- Started a successful education campaign to improve the way we recycle.
- Improved traffic signals and signage in many locations all over town.
- Continued sanitary sewer improvements. Over 75% of the improvements ordered by the courts in 2011 are now complete with total costs under original estimates.

I want to close today with a big thank you to our residents. You are extraordinary.

Back in November, I asked everyone in Lexington to dig into their pockets and contribute to a month-long food drive for God's Pantry Food Bank that we called "Lexington's Big Give." Wow, what a response! You donated 105,000 pounds of food during one month. God's Pantry was "blown away" - those are their words. 41% of all of the food collected for God's Pantry in 2025 came from the "Big Give." 41%!! Plus \$6,000 in monetary contributions, all to combat food insecurity.

It's such an honor to be Mayor of a city with a heart that big.

For 250 years, Lexington's people have been her secret strength. Through our shared vision and productive partnerships, this community works together to ensure Lexington's future is bright.

Congratulations to all of you and thank you for all that you do for our community.

Together we are advancing into the future.

*

*

*

The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

