

Lexington- Fayette Urban County Government Council Meeting

State of the City County Address

Lexington, Kentucky January 24, 2023

The Council of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Kentucky convened in regular session on January 24, 2023 at 12:10 p.m. in the Central Bank Center, 430 W. Vine St., in Lexington, Kentucky. Present were Mayor Gorton in the chair presiding, and the following members of the Council: Plomin, Reynolds, Sevigny, Sheehan, Worley, Wu, F. Brown, J. Brown, Ellinger, Elliott Baxter, Fogle, Gray, LeGris, and Lynch. Absent was Council Member Monarrez.

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Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. For the first time in two years, we're in person for this annual address, and for the first time ever, we're enjoying our bigger and better convention center.

Thank you to the Lexington Forum for again hosting this speech, and congratulations on your 40th anniversary! Since its earliest days, The Forum has hosted us, beginning back in the 80s. I want to thank President Lisa Smith and the members of the Forum for their service to our city.

Welcome, to all of the public officials who are with us.

Let's begin today with an introduction of our energetic, diverse Urban County Councilmembers. Six of these folks, including our Vice Mayor, are brand new to government. They've moved into City Hall with fresh ideas for our community. Please stand as I say your name: First our Vice Mayor, Dan Wu Councilmember-at-large James Brown, Councilmember-at-large Chuck Ellinger, First District Tayna Fogle, Second District Shayla Lynch, Third District Hannah LeGris, Fourth District Brenda Monarrez, Fifth District Liz Sheehan, Sixth District Denise Gray, Seventh District Preston Worley, Eighth District Fred Brown, Ninth District Whitney Baxter, Tenth District Dave Sevigny, Eleventh District Jennifer Reynolds, and Twelfth District Kathy Plomin. Let's give them all a round of applause!

Lexington's government has one and only one focus: meeting the needs of 325,000 people. It's that simple - and that complicated. As you might expect, the biggest challenge is focusing on the things that do the most good for the most people.

It takes talented administrators, my Chief of Staff Tyler Scott, and our Chief Administrative Officer Sally Hamilton, the commissioners who head up our government departments, and an army of knowledgeable city employees, to get it done.

Today, I want to talk about some of the work our employee teams from across government are doing to meet the needs of people in Lexington. I've included a few individual examples that illustrate how challenging this work can be, and how important it is to get it right.

Let's start with the Department of Public Safety. Until 2018, when we established the Community Paramedicine Program, firefighters could only address a patient's emergency needs. Community Paramedicine gives them the opportunity to look a little deeper, and find longer-term solutions for people. This is our Community Paramedicine Team, which also includes police officers and social workers. Community Paramedicine recently won the Whelen Everyday Champion award.

Here's one example of how they helped a patient named Rose: Firefighter Patrick Branam and Police Detective Kristie Smith, who are both here today, met Rose after emergency crews brought her into a local hospital. Rose had serious health problems that required continuing medical care. When she met community paramedics she had been homeless for nearly two years. Over time, getting to know Rose, they were able to provide ongoing medical – their van is equipped for that - and mental health treatment, housing stability, money management, and wrap around continued supports. Since July 2022, Rose has been securely housed, and Community Paramedics see her regularly. To make that happen, Community Paramedicine worked closely with our Police Department, our folks in housing, social service agencies and health care providers. Teamwork is an essential part of nearly everything we do in government.

2022 was a great year for the Fire Department. The department won a SAFER grant, allowing us to hire 21 new firefighters. The grant covers their salaries for three years. With federal funds, we replaced old equipment; we want our firefighters to have the best equipment. Since the rest of the state depends on our elite services in times of

need, when the floods came to Eastern Kentucky, our firefighters, including boat crews, Search and Rescue crews, Incident Management Teams, and our Mobile Ambulance Bus, were among the first to mobilize to help. We also were able to donate used equipment to Eastern Kentucky cities.

Like our firefighters, our police officers save lives every day. To meet the challenges of the future we have continued to modernize their crime-fighting tools. That's why we have moved ahead with the expansion of the FLOCK license plate readers. There will soon be a total of 100 license plate readers scattered across the city. The technology is an effective tool across the country, and on Lexington's streets. In just 10 months in Lexington, license plate readers have helped bring justice to victims, locate missing persons, arrest wanted individuals, recover stolen property, and assist in the capture of homicide suspects. To date, over 200 success stories have been attributed to the license plate readers, resulting in over \$1.8 million of stolen property being recovered and more than 40 guns seized.

Consider Greg Padgett's experience: Last November, detectives received several reports of burglaries, where back doors of homes were kicked in, including Greg's home. A home camera system captured a photo of a suspect vehicle. Detectives used that photo and several others, and the FLOCK license plate readers to identify the vehicle involved in the crime. Officers recovered over \$7000 worth of stolen property and returned it to Greg and the other victims. A suspect was arrested. As Greg later wrote to me, "The diligence of our police, with the assistance of the FLOCK license plate reader and neighborhood cameras, allowed an arrest to take place on the fourth day after the occurrence!" Greg's experience is becoming more common, as difficult cases that might have remained unsolved in the past now instead end with justice for the victim.

Clearly, our police have had a busy year that also included current construction of the new East Sector Roll Call Center. Police also worked with a business group I established to address challenges downtown. And they made an enormous contribution to the success of the Breeders' Cup visit.

Technology moves us forward, but it cannot help with all of our public safety needs. Last year, there was a significant increase in the number of homicides related to domestic violence. There were 13 homicides related to domestic violence in 2022; compared to just

one in 2021. Teams of advocates and specialized police detectives work with survivors of domestic violence to keep them safe, as they build cases to prosecute the abusers.

To ensure domestic violence victims know they can get help, Stephanie Theakston and our city's Domestic and Sexual Violence Prevention Coalition recently launched a public awareness campaign called "It's Time to Get Honest about Domestic Violence" and they're providing Green Dot Active Bystander Training, offering safe ways to intervene.

We have also given victims of domestic violence a simple way to ask for help by encouraging them to call 3-1-1. Trained Operators connect victims to the services they need.

We continue our focus on reducing gun violence among youth and young adults. Devine Carama, Director of ONE Lexington in the Mayor's Office, and staff members, Larry Johnson and Kenny Payne, work with police and partners throughout government. We have greatly expanded ONE Lexington, and it is getting results. Between 2021 and 2022, we saw a 50 percent decrease in gun-related homicides among youth and young adults, and a 15 percent decrease in shootings. ONE Lexington is building the capacity of community partners experienced in assisting families affected by violence by providing support and resources. Here are some of ONE Lexington's community partners. Last summer, ONE Lexington was referred to a family that had just lost a loved one to gun violence. ONE Lexington's Crisis Response advocates engaged this family by bringing food from its community partners, and assessing the situation to see what support family members needed, such as mental health resources, help with some household bills, and mentoring programs for the two younger children in the home. The Crisis Response team engaged 50 individuals and families last year, and mediated 19 conflicts among young people.

One of the most critical areas my administration prioritizes every day is affordable, safe housing. Housing issues are often complex and challenging. In many cases though, we have to reach down to the individual level to make the difference. We recently hired our first Housing Advocate, Caitlyn Dixon, in our new Department of Housing Advocacy and Community Development. She helps residents navigate sometimes complicated housing needs to find solutions inside and outside of government. In just six months she has helped 106 households.

This year we are making an enormous investment in affordable housing, including over \$11 million in federal funds and \$4.8 million in local funds. Currently, 846 affordable apartments are under construction and scheduled to open next year. All of these units are designed for people who really need assistance.

Since February 2021, our federally funded rental assistance program, designed to ease the economic impact of the pandemic, has provided more than \$40 million in rent and utility assistance to over 6,000 households, helping people who had economic setbacks because of COVID-19. We are currently working to refocus this program to concentrate on residents with the greatest risk of housing instability.

We have also invested federal funds in our homeless response system. Working with Community Action, we have funded two new transitional housing projects to move people off the street into transitional, then permanent, housing. To meet the needs of people who are homeless we have worked with partners to expand space in shelters, provide increased street outreach, and ensure beds are available for medical respite services.

Another new program, the Housing Repair Assistance Program, helps low-income homeowners make repairs to resolve Code Enforcement violations, like loose gutters, damaged roof covering, siding, doors and windows, and improperly working heating and air conditioning systems. We set aside \$600,000 in federal funds for this program.

Judy and Joey Hensley are here today. Code Enforcement cited them because the front porch on their house on Burley Avenue was collapsing. The Hensleys couldn't afford to replace the porch, but qualified for the Homeowner Assistance Program. Here's their house, before and after. Long-term, the program will protect homeowners and lift up neighborhoods.

Some people have problems with finding housing, employment, and with continuing their education because of low level criminal records. Last April, we held an expungement clinic and job fair called "Clean Slate Lexington." The event provided residents with an opportunity to expunge low level offenses from criminal records, providing second chances for employment, education, and housing. Thanks to many partners we were able to serve over 400 people that day, and plan another event this year.

Job opportunities for all are another critical component of a safe and healthy city. At the city, we work every day to create new jobs by attracting new employers to our city, and helping local businesses grow new jobs. We also work to ensure everyone can get the job training they need to compete for good jobs.

Overall, our economy is thriving. Unemployment in Fayette County is at 3.1%. Employment has surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In July we set a record for the number of people employed in Fayette County – the fourth highest month since 1990, when tracking began. We are determined to make sure those numbers continue to improve.

Let's talk about several of the Economic Development programs that are underway to attract new companies:

First, Ag Tech.

We're working to make Lexington a hub for ag-tech businesses through the Bluegrass Ag Tech Development Corp, recently established by the city, Dean Nancy Cox of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment; Dr. Mark Lyons, President and CEO of Alltech; and Dr. Ryan Quarles, Kentucky Commissioner of Agriculture. Thank you, Dean Cox, for joining us today.

The city has invested \$1 million in start-up costs. We just got exciting news over the weekend that we will receive an additional \$1 million in funding from the Kentucky Agriculture Development Board to move this initiative ahead.

Next, Lexington's participation in the Commerce Lexington Regional Economic Development Partnership:

The city, in partnership with Commerce Lexington and led by Andi Johnson, Commerce Lexington's Chief Policy Officer, joins a nine-county partnership in working on a regional economic development strategy. Thank you, Andi, for being here today. And thanks to Bob Quick, Commerce Lexington President and CEO.

Third, we hope to attract new employers to Legacy Business Park at Coldstream:

After several years of planning and development of the site master plan, we now have our team in place to take the city's 200-acre Legacy Business Park at Coldstream from concept to construction. The master plan incorporates green space that will be

enjoyed by adjoining neighbors and will connect to the Legacy Trail for cyclists and walkers. Recently, we hired Cushman Wakefield, a global real estate firm, to serve as the project lead for real estate, helping us add to our economic base. Dave Kelly is here today representing Cushman Wakefield. The park is projected to provide good jobs for 2,100 people.

To help local businesses grow, we work with individual clients to meet their needs. We also support existing businesses by making it easier for them to do business with local government. For the development community we are installing Open Counter, an expansion of our One-Stop Shop. Starting this March, Open Counter will allow employers and others considering a construction project in Lexington to look virtually at available property and its zoning, the permits needed, and almost every other aspect of the development process.

We hope our work to extend broadband to the rural area will soon help individual households and the many local businesses that operate on our farms.

Our Chief Information Officer Aldona Valicenti organized a regional broadband initiative with neighboring counties. An RFP was issued for accessible, affordable broadband in underserved and unserved sections of seven Central Kentucky counties. Spectrum is now applying for grants for several counties through state and federal programs designed to provide broadband in the rural areas, including rural Fayette County. Each county is pursuing individual financial arrangements.

As for work force training we provide, let me introduce you to Braxton Fuller, who has joined us today. After graduating from UK, Braxton became interested in the trucking industry and found out about our class at Community Action Council that offered free training to get a commercial driver's license. He took the class, and soon found full-time employment at Coca-Cola. An entrepreneur, Braxton has started his own trucking business. Braxton says he likes Lexington for all the opportunity it has brought him.

Streets and Roads is part of our "nuts and bolts" department, otherwise known as the Department of Environmental Quality and Public Works.

10-year-old Cora wanted some important changes made in her neighborhood, and she wrote to her Councilmember, Whitney Baxter. Streets and Roads put in ramps on street corners, now known as Cora's Corners, and also created new sidewalk entrances

to Shillito Park. In addition to Cora's Corners, it has been a busy year in Streets and Roads, which filled over 4,400 potholes and responded to 334 calls to get trees or limbs out of the road.

Streets and Roads, working with Waste Management, also found time to help flood victims in Whitesburg and Wayland, cleaning out sewers and rebuilding culverts to give people access to their homes.

Our Public Works and Environmental Quality folks have tough jobs, picking up garbage at 98,000 homes and 4,000 businesses, maintaining hundreds of miles of sewer pipes, keeping our city clean, mowing our green spaces, building new roads, paving old roads, recycling, and much more.

Here are a few highlights for 2022:

We restarted curbside paper recycling. We completed the widening of Clays Mill Road. A water quality project in Southland Park was named stormwater project of the year by the American Public Works Association, including a new playground. We won a \$19.5 million grant to fund our stormwater and sanitary sewer work. And we made 1,112 upgrades to traffic signals.

From the youngest to the oldest, our Department of Social Services reaches out to help our people. At the Family Care Center, families with children ages 0-5 are empowered to achieve stability and resilience.

At the Audrey Grevious Center and Parent and Guardian Empowerment, teens find social workers and caring teachers who provide the right help with challenges so they can find success in the classroom and in life;

Young people also find support through all kinds of grassroots programs sponsored through Partners for Youth. From our Substance Use Disorder Intervention Program, teens and adults get the help and treatment they need to battle addiction. Like Tyler Foster, who is celebrating two years of recovery from substance use disorder. He is employed full-time, but took a day off so he could be with us today. Congratulations Tyler!

The city has recently won a second \$2 million grant to fight the opioid crisis. And we are in line to receive funding through the Opioid settlement. Working with our partners, we are saving many lives.

Our senior centers touched the lives of 10,000 seniors, offering a place to find friendship, support, and a variety of programs, 982 new seniors joined the senior centers in 2022.

Last year, for the first time, Social Services had the unique opportunity to help non-profit agencies with capital needs. Specifically, 23 agencies got assistance with 45 projects.

2022 was a banner year for parks investments. Here are the newly installed climbing boulders just installed at Northeastern Park. Other features are being added and the park is expected to reopen in next month. Thanks to federal funds, we are designing and developing Cardinal Run North, a large community park that will be a real game-changer. And we purchased property on the Kentucky River for kayaks and canoes ... a first for Fayette County. Thanks to private donors, construction of a new destination park, Town Branch Park, will get underway this spring. Private donors also helped us open a new Dog Park in Veterans Park. The city is investing \$25 million, which has allowed us to improve parks all over town with playgrounds that are accessible to all, pickleball courts, trails, a new pirate ship for Woodland Pool, and more. One of our greatest transformations has come downtown at Charles Young Park, where there's a new playground, resurfaced basketball courts, and construction is underway on a spray ground. Just this summer we opened Town Branch Commons Trail, which leads to Charles Young Park and several other downtown parks as it meanders through town.

Using federal funds, we are also investing in an important downtown arts facility. The city is now the official owner of the Pam Miller Downtown Arts Center, and we are renovating the unused third floor and the vacant first floor restaurant.

Next year, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of our merged government, a landmark change for our city. Merger created increased efficiency in responding to the needs of our residents, and that's important, all 325,000 of them.

As many have said, local government is where the rubber meets the road. Be it an actual road, or an international pandemic, local government is there, responding to cries for help, picking up the garbage, keeping the traffic moving, managing playgrounds, and much, much more.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”

We set the bar high – we want the best for our residents; so we continue, every day, to work for the very best for our community.

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The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Deputy Clerk of the Urban County Council

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