

Lexington- Fayette Urban County Government Council Meeting

State of the City County Address

Lexington, Kentucky January 30, 2023

The Council of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Kentucky convened in regular session on January 30, 2023 at 12:15 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.

\*

\*

\*

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.

Thank you to the Lexington Forum for again hosting this speech. I want to recognize Forum President Megan Holley-Slaughter and the members of the Forum for their outstanding service to our city.

Congratulations to all of the Forum's award-winners!

Welcome to all public officials here today.

Let's begin today with an introduction of our Urban County Councilmembers. Please hold your applause until I introduce all of our Councilmembers. Councilmembers, if you could 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 Seigny, Eleventh District Jennifer Reynolds, and Twelfth District Kathy Plomin. Let's give them all a round of applause!

There's another important group I want to recognize today – the team that helps me run this City; 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 every day. You rock! Let's give them a round of applause!

Our new President at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Dr. Gregory Feeney, has also joined us. Thank you.

On a personal note, my husband, Charlie Gorton, has joined us. He is my secret weapon, supporting me for years, enabling me to be a public servant. Thank you!

Five years! It has been five years since my first State of the City-County Speech on Jan. 22, 2019, when I challenged us all to Dream Big! In that time, we've marked five years of progress. I have kept the promise I first made as a member of the Council, then again as Mayor: that government must focus on building strong citizens, and strong families, and through them, a strong community.

Building a strong community by building strong citizens is not a new idea. Perhaps Plato, speaking to us across the millennia, said it best: "This city is what it is because our citizens are what they are." Our city supports its citizens ... and I'm talking about everyone who lives here ... by keeping Lexington safe; working to attract good jobs and helping local companies grow; building a sound infrastructure; supporting the arts and cultural community; maintaining a high quality of life; and catching people who are in danger of falling.

To meet our residents' needs, our government is reaching out with new technology, and through new community partners, such as housing advocates, violence prevention experts, mental health professionals, social workers, translators, and more. Let's take a few minutes to talk about the dreams we've turned into progress, and how we are preparing for the year ahead.

First, citizens must have safe community. Strong public safety is the foundation of any successful city, and it is our top priority. In the past two years, we have made significant investments in technology to give our police officers new crime-fighting tools. The Real Time Intelligence Center, relying on FLOCK and Fusus technology, acts as a police force multiplier, saving our officers time, and helping them build stronger cases. This technology provides up-to-date, real time intelligence, allowing our police to respond to calls quickly, and with more precision. In 2023, FLOCK license plate readers assisted Police in:

- Recovering 127 stolen vehicles with a total value of \$1.6 million.
- Recovering 17 guns through stolen vehicle investigations, guns that are now off the streets.
- Locating 4 missing people who had been entered into National Crime Information Center.
- Serving 127 warrants or subpoenas.

These are solid steps toward a safer Lexington.

Lexington's Fire and Emergency Services has kept our citizens safe for over 150 years. We have one of the best fire departments in the country, ranked in the highest class with only 119 fire departments, nationwide.

In 2017, our firefighters developed our model Community Paramedicine Program, which takes a more comprehensive approach to the care of individual patients, such as those who need help with mobility, addiction or mental health issues. In 2023, Community Paramedicine provided services to 761 individuals, including 331 people who had experienced a non-fatal overdose. Over the past year, we have increased the staffing of the Community Paramedicine Program to meet community needs, adding two additional firefighters and two social workers. We also won a \$1.3 million grant that allows us to hire two additional social workers for the program. It's well worth the investment. This program saves lives.

Violence reduction is a key part of the mission of our ONE Lexington youth program, which partners with non-profits, public health, public safety, residents, and our schools to interrupt the path of violence that surrounds too many young people in our city. The program is building strong citizens, one young person at a time. Through one-on-one mentoring, prevention education, crisis response, neighborhood engagement, downtown peacekeeping, restorative justice, and survivor support, ONE Lexington and the community partners it engages worked with thousands of young people in 2023, encouraging them, and providing the tools they need to learn to work out differences peacefully. How effective is it? Doing its part, ONE Lexington, has helped reduce homicides and shootings:

- In 2022, Lexington had 44 homicides compared to 24 in 2023.
- For the first time in five years, Lexington had fewer than 100 shootings in 2023.

With us today is Leonard Clark, a licensed clinical social worker who volunteers with ONE Lexington's efforts downtown, including one night last fall when there was a shooting. His work helped diffuse group fights. Thank you, Leonard.

Through the work of Tiffany Brown, my Equity and Implementation Officer, we are also addressing the impact of poverty and lack of transportation through programs like the Mobile Market, which takes fresh food into neighborhoods where there is no grocery nearby, and expungement clinics that have expunged over 1,000 criminal records of non-violent offenses, easing barriers to education, housing, and jobs.

As we work to build strong people, one essential key is a good job. Government's role is strengthening the fabric of our economy to promote, attract and produce good-paying jobs. Economic development is our bread and butter, and it's something we focus on every day. We are getting results. Our economy is running full steam ahead, fully recovered from the pandemic and breaking records for the number of people employed. There are almost 3,000 more people employed now in Fayette County than in March 2020, just before the pandemic delivered a body blow to our economy. We have more than recovered! We are thriving! Furthermore, in partnership with Commerce Lexington, we're working with our nearby counties in the Bluegrass Region to encourage regional employment growth. When one of us wins, we all win!

This year, we anticipate the opening of Baptist Health's new Hamburg campus. When completed, the campus is expected to produce more than 600 good-paying jobs.

Congratulations to Baptist Health Lexington Chief Operating Officer Chris Roty and everyone at Baptist Health. Chris, thank you!

Our Bluegrass AgTech Development Corp is up and running! Our city's partnership with the University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment; the Kentucky Department of Agriculture; and Alltech is focused on making Lexington and Kentucky the international hub for agtech businesses.

We recently launched a new grant program designed to encourage agtech and food-based businesses to locate in Kentucky, and the response has been tremendous. So far, over 70 companies have expressed an interest. Thank you to Bob Helton, our Bluegrass Agtech director who has joined us today.

Workforce investments are also critical to the success of our economy, as well as our citizens. Helping people qualify for a first job, or find a better job, is essential to building strong workers, and a strong community.

Last January we launched a new career services learning system called WORK-Lexington Edge. It's user-friendly, and can be accessed from a phone, tablet, or a computer by Fayette County residents. And last July, we started our Second Chance Academy inside the Fayette County Detention Center. It's a year-long pilot program.

Working with Mason King and Jubilee Jobs, a non-profit that helps job seekers overcome poverty and achieve self-sufficiency, we provide Career Services for about 200 inmates who have no more than six months left on their sentences. Mason, we appreciate you!

We have also started our BFREE Initiative, which helps people in recovery for substance use disorder who are transitioning out of the criminal justice system.

A strong fiber optic network is very important to attracting and growing jobs. Our urban areas generally have the necessary fiber. Now, work has started in our rural area,

backed by a series of state and federal grants. Bright blue circles and blue shapes show projects being done this year; red dots, in the next 2-3 years. Meanwhile, the city is providing more services on-line: Registration for Parks programming, improved transparency on-line in Corrections, on-line payment of public works bills, alcoholic beverage licenses that you could previously only pay with a certified check, and this month, businesses can pay annual regulated fees online for the first time.

This year we are revamping our website, taking a huge step forward in transparency and in the digital services we are able to provide. 450,000 people visited our website in December. It's popular, and will be easier to use.

We all understand the importance of affordable housing in building strong citizens and a vibrant community. We have set records in 2023 for the amount invested in affordable housing -- \$7.4 million -- and for the number of the units created -- 234. That includes housing for people who are extremely low income, the elderly, people with severe mental illnesses, and for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

2024 is the 10th anniversary of the creation of the city's affordable housing fund. Since 2014, our community has invested over \$30 million local dollars in affordable housing. We have also received an additional \$13 million in federal grants, and leveraged an additional \$390 million from partners.

Beginning in the next budget, we will allocate 1% of the prior year's revenue to the Affordable Housing Fund. This will generate about \$5 million annually, a significant increase. This year, nearly 2,800 acres of expansion land were identified for development, with a priority placed on constructing affordable and workforce housing. New regulations will be designed that further promote equity in housing development throughout the Urban

Service Area. We have also expanded our assistance to those experiencing homelessness by establishing Hope Village, a temporary shelter that adds up to 240 beds through the winter months. Managed by the Hope Center, Hope Village also provides meals, bathrooms, and showers. In January, an average of 174 people stayed at Hope Village each night.

In ramping up our efforts to help people navigate housing challenges, we hired the city's first housing advocate, bringing a new service to our government in 2022. In her first year, she served 733 households. We've now added a second advocate, and together they serve an average of 100 people a month.

Our Social Services employees help citizens address many challenges. Victims of domestic violence, young families, youth, people battling addiction, and senior citizens are among those who find the help they need in Social Services, or through the many nonprofit agencies that are the Department's partners. To enable those non-profits to better serve their clients, Social Services has long provided grants for programming services through the city budget. 2023 was just the second time we have provided capital improvement grants. We found many of these agencies were in desperate need of capital improvements that could improve the services they were able to offer. In 2023, the city awarded almost \$480,000 in capital grants to 12 nonprofit agencies. An example is \$55,000 for a new HVAC system for the Bob Brown House. Heat failed at the Bob Brown House in December, and they have already replaced the unit. Welcome to CEO Amy Brown, and thank you for the work you do.

Let's talk about places where the city is literally building progress through construction:



- First, we are making progress on a new location for city hall, a goal for many years. We anticipate having definite plans by summer;
- In September, we completed construction of a new police roll call, located near Man-O-War off Tates Creek. It positions police closer to major traffic arteries and neighborhoods.
- We are building a new workforce training center in Davis Park. The Center will offer career and employer services for residents and businesses, serving as the home base for all our WORK-Lexington initiatives.
- We are also building a Community Center in Davis Park. It will be used for social, educational and recreation programming.
- We plan to break ground on Legacy Business Park in the spring. There will soon be 146 acres of industrial office park land available for development, and hundreds of new jobs.
- We completed \$11.7 million in road resurfacing.
- We are designing a new Senior and Therapeutic Recreation Center to be located in Shillito Park.
- This year, we will start construction of Cardinal Run North, the first large regional park we have opened in over 25 years.
- Work continues on Kelley's Landing, our new park that will offer the city's first public river access for canoes and kayaks.
- We opened a new water feature in Charles Young Park, called Splash.
- We're adding sidewalks along Rosemont Garden; and sidewalks and bike lanes on Mt. Tabor, and Armstrong Mill; and,

- We installed a new monument in Veterans Park, recognizing Fayette County inductees into the Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame.

We will begin work on our Complete Streets Action Plan to establish streets that are safe for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists all over town. With our numbers of pedestrian collision fatalities rising, Complete Streets planning, a long-term goal, is very important. We recently received one of the biggest federal grants in our history -- almost \$22 million -- to make safety improvements along New Circle Road North -- where most of our recent fatal or severe crashes have occurred. Many of these crashes involved pedestrians or cyclists.

I traveled to Washington to talk to federal transportation officials and members of our Congressional delegation about the importance of this grant. Our federal and state officials worked together to make it happen. We secured a second federal grant through the state -- \$8 million to reconstruct the railroad overpass on North Broadway near New Circle. This will improve pedestrian safety and eliminate flooding. Both of these grants bring much needed safety improvements to north Lexington. Representing Senator Mitch McConnell, who helped secure these awards, is Stephanie Nelson.

Quality of life is important to building strong citizens. People who are part of our arts and cultural community have had an enormous impact on our city, enriching our quality of life, and building Lexington's national reputation for the arts. A few years ago, the Council decided to invest in public art each year through a percent-for-art program. Soon, new public art works will start to emerge around town.

Early this year, our Public Art Commission will announce the selection of an artist for the creation of a new sculpture that will sit along Old Frankfort Pike, just outside New

Circle Road. This summer, the commission is also planning to install public art in Gainesway Park. In addition, in 2025, we will celebrate the founding of our city through public art. A national call for artists has been posted. The piece will be installed downtown in 2025. For those who would like to know where to find our public art, we worked with our award-winning GIS team to create Lexington's first searchable Public Art Map, offering individuals a no-cost opportunity to view, locate, and learn about over 140 works and installations dating from 1857 to the present. It's on our website.

Finally, our Art on the Town Carts have offered another opportunity to interact with local artists, who use the carts to sell or demonstrate their work. In 2023, the carts were used 265 times by 41 different artists at a variety of downtown events.

Like the arts, parks are an important and popular key to our quality of life. They offer citizens opportunities to get outdoors, take a stroll, exercise, and enjoy recreational activities. We have over 100 parks, including small neighborhood parks, huge community greenspaces, and natural areas. Over the past couple of years, we have been on a community-wide parks improvement crusade, replacing playgrounds, adding, improving, and replacing sports courts, adding and upgrading trails; updating pools, and adding new pool play features like the fabulous U.S.S. Woodland; repairing paving; and much more. Altogether, in 2023, we completed over \$8.2 million in these parks improvements, part of an overall investment of over \$28 million in our parks.

Five years! The time has flown by. Together, we've faced enormous challenges and made great progress.

This is a wonderful city full of the best people anywhere.

It is my great honor to serve as your Mayor, and to lead this city forward. Thank you.

\*

\*

\*

The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

---

Deputy Clerk of the Urban County Council