



2025 State of the City Address

The Honorable Frank Scott, Jr.

73rd Mayor of the City of Little Rock

Good evening, Little Rock! I want to thank the Central High Madrigals, Bishop Harmon, our city team members, residents, and especially Christian, Bailey and Anthony for that great introduction. Special thanks to Principal Porter, Superintendent Jermall Wright and the Little Rock School District for hosting us tonight at the beautiful, new, state-of-the-art Dr. Marion G. Lacey K-8 Academy in the heart of my home - Southwest Little Rock. As always, I appreciate the Little Rock Board of Directors and our 2,500 City of Little Rock team members who work tirelessly, day in and day out, to make Little Rock great.

Our city is the region's center of government, finance, health care, business, education, arts, culture, and history, and I am deeply proud to serve as your mayor, working alongside our residents of diverse backgrounds and distinct gifts, to fulfill the hope and promising future of this great city. That future is bright, thanks to you, the great people who call Little Rock home!

Friends, sometimes it feels like the world around us is falling apart. We know that in times of uncertainty, our city's strength lies in our ability to reinforce the foundation that holds us together. That is why we are doubling down on what matters most this year: getting Back to the Basics - going from good to great. Our focus is clear: ensuring that every resident, every neighborhood, and every business feels seen, heard, and valued.

Across the country, cities are facing economic shifts, rising costs, and evolving community challenges. But here in the Capital City, we are responding by continuing to focus on the fundamentals of public safety, strong neighborhoods,

efficient government, and a city where residents feel engaged and empowered. We are committed to building a government that delivers results, listens to its people, and invests in the core services that shape daily life. When we strengthen the basics, we strengthen our city for everyone.

Now let me be clear. In 2025, we owe it to you to provide the exceptional service you trust and demand. That's why we are expanding neighborhood meetings, town halls, and digital engagement platforms to ensure that every resident has direct access to their city leaders, and we learn what you care about most.

First, we are going on tour!

So, join us for Mobile City Hall, where leaders from various departments will spend dedicated time in neighborhoods across this city, listening to residents' concerns and providing real-time solutions. This is an effort to be more like the Selfie King - Director Virgil Miller - breaking down barriers and making city government more accessible, visible, and responsive to the needs of our communities. Stay tuned for more information and a schedule very soon.

Beyond direct engagement, we recognize the power of partnerships. This year, we are strengthening collaborations with faith-based organizations, nonprofits, and small businesses, the trusted community anchors that serve as the heartbeat of our neighborhoods. By working together, we can amplify resident voices, expand outreach efforts, and ensure that critical resources reach the people who need them most.

Not only do we want to listen, but we also want you to access resources and information from your city in the most effective and efficient manner. That's why tonight, I'm excited to introduce Roxie – our brand-new AI chatbot that is currently in beta testing and near completion. Last year, we promised to leverage artificial intelligence to better serve you.

That's a promise that we kept - as residents can chat with Roxie 24/7 to navigate the City's website and find answers to your most pressing questions. It will be up and running before the end of March.

As city leaders, we are committed to doing our part, but building a stronger Little Rock requires all of us. Government is not a one-way street. It is a partnership between city officials and the people we serve. I'm asking, no, I'm urging every resident - from Hanger Hill to the Heights, Chenal to College Station, Geyer Springs to Granite Mountain, and everyone in between - to get involved: join a board or commission, attend public meetings, and be an active voice in shaping the future of our city. We need you.

One of the best ways to engage with city government is through [R.O.C.K.](#) (Residents Obtaining Community Knowledge) Academy, our six-week program designed to give residents an inside look at how your city operates. Last year, we graduated 28 new graduates. And now, applications for the 2025 class are officially open! I encourage anyone interested in learning more about city government to apply today. Not only do we want you to be engaged with the city, but we also want you to show up for the city. You may ask, well, how can I do that?

For example, this Sunday we'll have visitors from all 50 states and at least 11 different foreign countries at the [Little Rock Marathon](#). This event brings us more than 30,000 visitors and **4 million dollars** in spending right to our city! I hope you'll support this amazing event by participating, volunteering or cheering for all our athletes. Will everyone who has ever volunteered, participated or supported a friend at the Little Rock marathon please stand up? Now that's a great example of engagement!

My grandfather told me a city has three essential responsibilities: Catch the robbers, put out fires, and pick up the trash. Vice Mayor BJ Wyrick calls them the nuts and bolts. Those simplified priorities have always been the core of my administration.

For me, "Getting Back to the Basics" is continuing to ensure that every resident feels safe in their home, neighborhood, and throughout our city. We know we've had a rough start to 2025. As your Mayor, I get a phone call after every homicide. Trust me, I wish I never received a single call. Any and every loss of life weighs heavy on my heart, but it is especially difficult when many of the victims and perpetrators are our youth, and those who look like me or come from the same part of town as I do. In my six years as Mayor, I have spoken to so many hurting families. Their lives will never be the same. And the potential revenge that follows keeps us in a cycle of violence that destroys families and neighborhoods.

Last year, homicides were down 42 percent compared to 2023. But these people are more than just numbers. They are names. And they matter, whoever they are and wherever they're from. That is why we will not rest – we cannot rest – until we end violent crime.

Accordingly, we are tackling public safety from every angle, not just responding to crime but preventing it BEFORE it happens. We are expanding our Community Violence Intervention Program, a proactive approach that gets ahead of crime before it takes root. We have restructured our street teams to focus on crime hotspots, meeting the issue at ground zero with intervention strategies designed to de-escalate conflicts before they turn violent.

An example of this intervention work is Keith Saine. Keith, can you stand?

Mr. Saine is a school-based interventionist at Central High School. He works with opportunity youth and students facing barriers to give them the resources they need to succeed. Recently, he turned his focus to two teenagers who endured unimaginable trauma after losing their brother to homicide. They, too, had their own experience with gun violence as it's become a part of their environment. Nevertheless, with Mr. Saine's guidance, these young men now attend school consistently, have landed their first jobs, volunteer with local nonprofits, and have improved their grades to mostly As and Bs. One is on track to graduate early and the other aspires to enlist in the Air Force. This intentional effort and intervention are what we mean by getting back to the basics, preventing crime before it actually occurs. Thank you, Mr. Saine and our Community Programs team, for your work to change lives in our city.

At the same time, we are continuing to invest in our public safety departments directly. I have asked Chief Helton to identify new ways to reduce retirements and increase recruitment to close some of the vacancies in the police department. In just a few years, we've gone from 120 vacancies to about 60. That represents a 10 percent vacancy rate. But guess what? In some metropolitan areas that number is as high as 25 percent. Our hiring efforts have outpaced the national average, and we are taking aggressive steps to fill every open position.

We will build on successful technology, like the Real Time Crime Center, ensuring ethical use of our cameras, to continue helping us solve crime at the highest level. We've seen faster response times from 911, and we look forward to launching our text to 911 feature later this year. This will ensure residents can get the help they

need by whatever means necessary. Because we all know that in an emergency, seconds count, so we will continue to leverage technology, training, and operational efficiency to further improve response times. Our goal is simple: when you call 911, someone picks up immediately and help arrives without delay.

This year, we will further enhance our community policing efforts by increasing foot patrols and even mounted patrols in neighborhoods, particularly those with high foot-traffic, like Downtown, the Southend and Wright Avenue. This is about visibility, accessibility, and strengthening relationships between officers and the communities they serve. While crime data shows a reduction in crime over the past five years and year-to-date, we are working around the clock to ensure residents and visitors alike feel safer in our city. We are committed to doing the work to make that happen. To ease the burden on our uniformed officers, we will look to build out additional non-uniform support, like social workers, within our Crisis Response Teams, so our officers can focus on true crime issues.

In the spirit of engagement, I call on our Public Safety Commission and our Commission on Children, Youth and Families to focus this year on specific and tangible crime prevention recommendations for me and our City Board. We know that community oversight strengthens public trust, and these commissions deserve a seat at the table.

We are also making great strides in our Fire Department. I'm proud to share that five new fire trucks will arrive in our city in a matter of months! We anticipate receiving our state-of-the-art burn building, which will be added to our training facility in April. We also look forward to hosting many of you at the groundbreaking at station 9 in Walnut Valley in the coming weeks. Later this year, we will begin laying infrastructure for a new station out west. These efforts represent over five million dollars of investment into the men and women of the Little Rock Fire department, and we look forward to identifying other ways to support their work.

Public safety matters because it is truly our most basic responsibility. But we know that crime is influenced by more than just policing. The environment around us also shapes it. When you drive around certain parts of the city and see blight, poor lighting, and neglected infrastructure, these conditions allow crime to take root. When we say we are getting back to the basics, we mean we are taking a more direct, proactive approach to restoring the heart of Little Rock by investing in quality housing, tackling blight, enhancing infrastructure, and ensuring every neighborhood has the amenities it needs to thrive.

Housing is more than just shelter; it is a fundamental public health issue. That's why today, I am calling on our City Board of Directors to help me declare housing a public health crisis in Little Rock. When residents don't have access to safe, stable, and affordable homes, every other aspect of life is impacted. This declaration is about taking a real, measurable action to address housing insecurity in our city. We have worked with lenders, realtors and contractors to increase our affordable housing stock by more than 150 units, and we have a goal of 200 more in the next two years. A key part of that commitment is the launch of the Little Rock Housing Trust Fund, a dedicated funding source to expand access to affordable housing. This initiative will help drive new development, preserve existing housing stock, and provide financial assistance to residents who need it most. In addition, we will work with developers and community organizations to expand homeownership opportunities, like the city's Down Payment Assistance Program. With the advocacy of City Director Andrea Lewis, we'll start this process of increasing our affordable housing stock in Ward 6, with a new subdivision development called Zion Square, which will consist of 14 newly constructed single-family units. We know neglected properties and blighted areas contribute to crime, lower property values, and diminish community pride. That's why we are taking direct action to eliminate blight and invest in neighborhood beautification.

Last year, through Project Impact, we made a difference in the Hope, Love, and Stephens neighborhoods of the 12th Street Corridor. Through a coordinated effort between Code Enforcement, Public Works, the Fire Department, and other city departments, we tackled long-standing issues related to bulk trash removal, illegal dumping, and neighborhood infrastructure. The results speak for themselves:

- We cut and cleared over 60 alleys and ditches
- Cleaned up more than 70 vacant lots
- Boarded up 20 homes
- Demolished three condemned properties
- Installed 117 smoke detectors
- Made outreach to over 400 homes

The Public Works department filled potholes to make our streets safer and smoother. This is what getting Back to the Basics looks like in action! It's about rolling up our sleeves, getting into our neighborhoods, and delivering real, tangible results that improve the lives of our residents. And we're just getting started.

Because of our success within the 12th Street corridor last year, I am excited to share that we are moving Project Impact right here to Southwest Little Rock in March. We will further promote neighborhood revitalization with our new Love Your Block Grant opportunity. Love Your Block will fund resident-led projects, empowering residents to take ownership of their neighborhoods and help create the vibrant, welcoming spaces we all want to live in. Applications for these grants will be made available soon.

We also look forward to expanding the work of City Director and “Litter Czar” Capi Peck to rally neighbors, businesses, schools, and community groups in a citywide effort to "PICK IT UP, Little Rock!" Director Peck has been a tireless advocate for keeping our city clean and litter-free, and she'll be the first to tell you this is a team effort. We call on everyone to step up, take pride in their community, and join us in making Little Rock a cleaner, greener place for all.

Homes don't just define a neighborhood; it's also defined by the streets, sidewalks, lighting, and public spaces that connect people to their communities. In 2025, we are making significant investments in infrastructure to ensure that every neighborhood is safer, more walkable, and more connected.

Through our One Rock Initiative, we are collaborating with our local public sector partners like CALS, Central Arkansas Water, and Rock Region Metro to ensure our infrastructure and revitalization plans are aligned and effective. From expanding sidewalks to improving water and sewer systems, leveraging our public transit, to upgrading streetlights, our goal is to create neighborhoods that are safe, connected, and strong.

When we talk about neighborhood revitalization, we must talk about everyone's neighborhood, Downtown Little Rock - the heart of our city. We are investing in development, amenities, and public spaces that make downtown a destination for all. A thriving downtown isn't just good for the businesses and residents who call it home; it's a citywide asset that boosts our economy, attracts visitors, and enhances our overall quality of life. Leading the way is the Clinton Presidential Center, which has delivered a 4.9 BILLION dollar impact in its two decades on the banks of the Arkansas River. Thank you, President Clinton and Secretary Clinton, for all you have done for Little Rock!

As the Clinton Center expands, it's time for us to refresh other areas downtown and truly lean into the Downtown Master Plan. A plan is just an idea until you act on it. So, this year, we will work with the Little Rock Convention and Visitors

Bureau on a facelift of the River Market Hall. Thanks to the leadership and advocacy of City Director Antwan Phillips and City Director Dean Kumpuris, we will transform this River Market Hall into a true attraction for tourists and our residents in the heart of downtown.

That's across the street from the site of the 30 Crossing Park - another centerpiece of the Downtown Master Plan. Our planning process with ARDOT is moving forward, and we are so grateful to have this green space adjacent to CALS and the Museum of Discovery. City Directors Phillips and Kumpuris have been the driving forces toward helping revitalize our Downtown, and we appreciate them for all their work.

Drive just out of downtown, and you'll see the Lyon College School of Dental Medicine is opening its doors in June. Arkansas's first dental school will be in Riverdale. It will change oral health outcomes for generations to come! Dr. Burke Soaf, the school's founding dean, is here with us tonight. Dr. Soaf, thanks to you, to Lyon College, and to your students for this tremendous asset you are bringing to our city and state.

We can't get back to the basics without addressing the economic strain so many residents are facing. When people are unable to afford a dozen eggs, we know more must be done to ensure our residents have what they need to make a decent living. Little Rock continues to set the standard for economic growth in Arkansas. We've worked alongside the Little Rock Regional Chamber to announce nearly 12,000 new, quality jobs over the past 6 years! According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Little Rock region reached a total of 373,000 jobs in 2024. That's 40,000 more people working than just a decade ago.

And we continue to invest in small businesses to ensure Little Rock is a place for entrepreneurs to make their dreams a reality.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, driving innovation, job creation, and economic growth in Little Rock. If you are an entrepreneur, we remain committed to making it easier for you to start, grow, and sustain your business. One of our top priorities this year is simplifying the process for small businesses to secure city contracts, ensuring that more local entrepreneurs, especially those from historically underrepresented communities, can do business with the city and access vital economic opportunities.

In addition, we have updated the [BUILD](#) and [Emprende](#) Curriculum, providing business owners in those incubators with essential training in bid writing, proposal development, and procurement processes. By equipping entrepreneurs with these skills, we ensure they are competitive, prepared, and ready to scale their operations. We also understand that access to capital remains one of the biggest challenges for small businesses. That's why we are expanding efforts to connect entrepreneurs with financial resources, grants, and mentorship programs, ensuring that every business owner, especially women and minority-owned businesses, has the support needed to thrive.

Beyond business development, we are prioritizing financial empowerment for all residents. In 2023, we took a major step forward by launching CapitalCon, a groundbreaking event designed to provide residents, entrepreneurs, and community leaders with the tools to build wealth, eliminate debt, and achieve long-term financial security. The overwhelming response confirmed what we already knew: there is a strong demand for financial education and empowerment in our city! We are thrilled to share that we are bringing CapitalCon back in 2025!

Building on that basic need for generating wealth, the City of Little Rock has been awarded a grant to create the Office of Financial Empowerment! This new office will work directly with residents to help them build assets and increase economic stability. In partnership with the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, we will launch programs that improve financial literacy, increase savings, and connect residents to various resources. There will be more to come on this new office later this year.

When we talk about getting Back to the Basics, we're talking about ensuring every resident has access to the resources, opportunities, and spaces that improve their quality of life. One of our top priorities is enhancing parks, trails, and recreational spaces to encourage active, healthier lifestyles. We know that access to safe, well-maintained outdoor spaces improves physical and mental well-being and can prevent crime. I want to recognize Parks Director Leland Couch's continued commitment to expanding and improving our parks, ensuring residents have greater access to high-quality amenities promoting wellness, community engagement, and outdoor activity. One of the most exciting additions in 2024 was the Boyle Park Playground and the new Boyle Mountain Bike Trails. Over in Pankey Park, we added a new playground, pavilion, and basketball court for that community. At Kanis Park, we upgraded the entry road, expanded trails, and refurbished the historic basketball courts. We look forward to inviting legends to Kanis for a throwback tournament later this year.

One of the most meaningful efforts this past year was the restoration of Murray Park and Rock Creek Trail, which suffered significant damage during 2023's devastating tornado. The storm left behind destruction across the west side of our city, but we remained committed to rebuilding and restoring these cherished community spaces. Today, thanks to our teams' hard work and dedication, these parks are once again open and thriving, serving as a testament to Little Rock's resilience and our commitment to ensuring every neighborhood has access to safe and well-maintained recreational areas.

We expect even more projects to be completed this year throughout our city - including Reservoir Park playground, West Central's new ballfield, our very own Senior Center, and upgrades at all our community centers. We remain grateful for the American Rescue Plan Act funds that allowed us to make many of these critical upgrades.

We also remain committed to addressing food insecurity and expanding access to fresh, healthy food. Our Mobile Grocery Store, which hits the streets this summer, will make a real difference in food deserts across the city, bringing quality groceries to neighborhoods that lack access to full-service supermarkets. I want to thank City Director Kathy Webb for her leadership and dedication to addressing food insecurity through the Food Commission. Under her guidance, the commission has already convened, laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable solutions to ensure that every resident of Little Rock has access to fresh, nutritious food. Their work is critical, and I have no doubt that their efforts will lead to meaningful progress in the fight against food insecurity in our city.

Another major initiative is our Micro Home Village for individuals experiencing homelessness. While we encountered construction delays, I want to reassure our residents that we remain fully committed to completing this project and getting it up and running later this year. This village will not just provide housing; it will also offer wrap-around services to help individuals get back on their feet with the support they need.

Despite the addition of the micro home village, we realize we still don't have enough beds for our unsheltered residents. Accordingly, I'm proud to announce that under the innovative leadership of Director Kevin Howard, we will acquire an additional facility to provide transitional housing for up to 75 unsheltered residents in our city.

Providing shelter for our most vulnerable residents during severe weather is not just a service; it's a fundamental responsibility. When extreme conditions hit, ensuring that everyone has a safe place to go is critical, and I am incredibly proud of the efforts of our Homeless Services Division, the Housing & Neighborhood Programs Department, Emergency Management, Parks, Police, Fire, and the many city departments that have come together to make this possible.

This year, our emergency shelter has been open for 21 days, with 247 hours of dedicated staff support, serving over 300 individuals in need during the harsh winter months. This is what it means to get Back to the Basics! Ensuring that no residents are left without shelter, care, or support when they need it most.

If we want to ensure a safe and healthy Little Rock, we must start by caring for the people who serve this city daily. That's why I'm proud to announce the City of Little Rock Health Clinic. This new facility will provide affordable, accessible healthcare for city employees, reducing costs, improving overall well-being, and ensuring our workforce is strong, healthy, and ready to serve. This clinic will be operational THIS YEAR, and I look forward to sharing more details in the months ahead.

A well-run city doesn't happen by chance. It requires smart investments, innovative solutions, and a commitment to efficiency. That's why we are making it easier and faster for residents to access city services, businesses to grow, and our government to work smarter. Residents and businesses shouldn't have to deal with red tape and delays when they need something from their city government. That's why we are streamlining business licensing, permitting, and city services to make processes more straightforward and accessible. Upgrading our technology will allow us to respond to your 311 requests faster, ensuring that your concerns are addressed quickly and efficiently. To demonstrate that exceptional service, we are continuously improving trash collection, making it more efficient and dependable.

That's why this year, we are launching a new pilot program called SmartWaste. This Public Works initiative leverages smart truck technology, GPS tracking, and workload management software to optimize trash collection routes and reduce delays. What does this mean? Streamlined workflows will make trash pickup faster and more reliable. It's about ensuring every resident receives the high-quality service they deserve, without uncertainty or delays.

In 2025, it's just a reality that we must do more with less. Inflation impacts the city's wallet just like it does yours. We must be more efficient in how we spend your money – and your time. For this reason, I've called on our department directors to take a hard look at their budgets. We have to identify new funding sources and propose ways to cut costs, so that the City Board can make informed decisions about the City's financial future. Public-private partnerships and the sale of unused city property must be on the table.

We are committed to ensuring the City of Little Rock remains the strong, resilient, inclusive city that has defined us from the beginning. Let's be clear: in this uncertain climate full of executive orders and actions that jeopardize the marginalized and underserved, whether you are gay or straight, black, brown, white, or any color of the rainbow: There is room at the table for all of us in the City of Little Rock. And we are a city that will make room for you even when others won't. You see, though it may seem like the world is on fire, that flame will never burn bright enough to dim the shining lights in each of us. Yes, all of you, join me and let your lights shine...

Working together, we can keep building a safe, thriving Little Rock that is full of opportunity for all. No one can do it alone. Progress happens when we all come together as residents, businesses, faith community, and elected officials to move Little Rock forward. We owe it to future generations of Little Rock residents to ask what kind of City we want to leave for them. Together, by getting back to the basics, we can build a stronger, safer and more unified Little Rock.

God bless you, and God bless our great City.