



2026 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 begin by recognizing my colleagues here tonight, the members of the Little Rock City Board of Directors who serve this city alongside me.

I also want to extend my thanks to our City Manager, Delphone Hubbard. Chief Hubbard has taken on this responsibility with professionalism, discipline, and pride, and I am grateful for his commitment to this city.

Tonight, it is important to pause and reflect on where we are standing.

The Hall sits along Historic West Ninth Street, once a thriving center of Black commerce, culture, and music.

Before segregation and disinvestment disrupted its vitality, this corridor reflected opportunity built through creativity and community pride.

Through intentional action and sustained work, we are restoring life to this corridor.

This place stands as proof that when a city honors its past, it strengthens its future.

That history grounds us, and by standing here tonight as your mayor is an honor.

It is also an honor to stand before you to share a report on the State of our City, the capital city of Arkansas, and the place we are proud to call home.

I want to begin by thanking the residents of Little Rock.

Doing the work means showing up early and staying late.

It means fixing what is broken, strengthening what works, and pushing forward even when progress feels slow.

It means understanding that no mayor builds a city alone.

I lead alongside about 2,500 public servants and Friends, we are doing the work.

You see it in falling crime rates and sustained economic growth, including nearly 14,000 jobs we helped create. You see it in 28 miles of resurfaced roads and \$72 million in secured grant funding that supports schools, nonprofits, and essential services. You see it in operational excellence, including our Fleet Services Department earning national recognition as one of the 100 Best Public Fleets in the Americas.

You see it in the delivery of 591 affordable housing units and the groundwork laid for more than 2,000 additional homes over the next five years, with the right funding. You see it in improvements to our 911 and 311 systems, because when residents call for help, seconds matter.

These outcomes do not happen by chance.

They happen because Little Rock moves forward when residents and neighbors look out for one another, when city teams do their jobs with pride, when community partners lean in, and when residents hold us accountable.

This city has always been about people working together.

Because of that shared effort, I can stand here tonight and say this clearly.

The State of our City is strong!

Not because challenges disappeared, but because we faced them.

Not because the work was easy, but because we stayed with it.

We kept showing up. We kept investing. We kept believing in what Little Rock can become.

A city that works.

A city that cares.

A city that understands the future is built through effort, not excuses.

Public safety remains the foundation of everything we do.

Nothing else works if people do not feel safe in their homes, their neighborhoods, and their city. Safety is a moral obligation and the first responsibility of local government.

The data tells a clear story.

Overall crime in Little Rock is down 28 percent compared to the five-year average. That means fewer victims, fewer families living with trauma, and more residents who feel secure in their daily lives.

This progress did not happen by accident. It happened because we were committed to a holistic approach and stayed disciplined under the leadership of Chief Helton.

Last year, we reached an agreement extending the Little Rock Police Department union contract through 2027. This agreement provides annual five percent pay increases and raises starting pay for new patrol officers to nearly \$61,000. These raises will make Little Rock home to the highest-paid municipal police force in Arkansas.

Today, nearly 5,500 residents and businesses voluntarily register with our Real-Time Crime Center. Because of this partnership, officers respond faster, coordinate more effectively, and close cases more efficiently, while improving officer safety.

To strengthen this work, our 2026 budget includes \$1 million dollars for new technology at the Real-Time Crime Center.

We will continue to be transparent and accountable in this work. I applaud City Director Antwan Phillips for his leadership in facilitating meaningful conversations on privacy, surveillance, and emerging technology. That approach reflects the fundamental fairness and the community-centered policing model we are committed to.

Through our Department of Community Programs, the City invested nearly \$2 million dollars last year in prevention and intervention efforts delivered through trusted community partners. Those investments supported tens of thousands of hours of direct engagement focused on mentorship, conflict resolution, early intervention, and connection to opportunity.

That work includes Project HEAL, Arkansas's first hospital-based violence intervention program in partnership with UAMS, conflict resolution through the Arkansas Community Dispute Resolution Centers, Inc., and Midnight Basketball, which engaged more than 400 young people during high risk hours through structured recreation and mentorship.

I am proud that the new director of the Community Programs department, Michael Sanders, who is with us, is a product of Little Rock's prevention efforts. His leadership reflects lived experience and a deep commitment to changing outcomes.

Safety also depends on readiness.

Our 911 Center has raised its call-answer rate within 20 seconds to 93 percent and filled long-standing vacancies. We will not stop until we reach 100 percent, because in an emergency, every second counts.

Working alongside our firefighters' union, we reached a historic agreement that provides substantial raises for the next three years and reflects the respect our firefighters have earned.

Thanks to our City Board, we invested more than \$2.5 million beyond the regular budget to address deferred maintenance at our fire stations. We have acquired five new trucks with nine more on the way. We've completed a state-of-the-art Class A burn training facility. We begun infrastructure work for a new station in West Little Rock. We started reconstruction of Fire Station 9 following the devastation of the 2023 tornado.

Katie McClanahan, who is with us tonight, can speak to the courage of our first responders.

During the April windstorm, a four-foot oak tree crashed through her home and trapped her beneath it. After a neighbor called 911, firefighters rushed in and worked for more than three hours to free her. They saved her life.

Our essential responsibilities remain simple and serious. Catch the robbers. Put out fires. Pick up trash. Fill the potholes.

As I speak, our team is preparing for the approaching winter storm.

Our resiliency shines through our emergency response capabilities, and we will answer the call yet again.

Public Works is readying trucks so crews can move quickly once conditions change.

Our Housing and Neighborhood Programs Department has activated its winter shelter plan so residents who need a warm, safe place can get inside without delay.

Readiness protects lives and keeps Little Rock moving.

The work is making a difference, and we will not stop.

Our economy continues to move, and we see the residual impact of that growth across our city.

Companies choose us for our location, skilled workforce, and quality of life.

This year, we will work with the Little Rock Regional Chamber on a comprehensive marketing and promotional campaign to tell Little Rock's story more clearly and more confidently to international audiences.

We will aim well beyond our goal to reach 400,000 people employed in the region by 2029. That requires teamwork.

Jay Chesshir and Jack Thomas with the Chamber and Bryan Day of the Port are here tonight.

Thanks to close collaboration with our federal partners, we were able to successfully relocate an FAA facility.

That effort enabled us to fully develop our first-ever industrial supersite.

As a result, we will secure a major project in the coming months, likely bringing a billion-dollar investment and thousands of jobs.

That is not an aspiration. That is a commitment we are delivering.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the corporate partners who have grown with us, including Dassault Falcon Jet and Amazon, as well as organizations that form the cultural and economic fabric of our city, such as the American Taekwondo Association.

Taekwon Lee, the organization's second-generation CEO, is with us tonight.

His father, H. U. Lee, built a thousand-school organization starting right here in Little Rock in 1977.

He believed deeply in this place. His motto was simple and powerful. "Today not possible. Tomorrow possible."

That same spirit defines our economic future.

Little Rock is growing.

Little Rock is competing.

And Little Rock is making that opportunity reaches the people who call this city home.

According to data from the Federal Reserve, the Little Rock region ranks second in five-year GDP growth among peer cities and regional state capitals, trailing only Nashville.

While we won't settle for second place, this ranking confirms that employers see a dependable workforce and leadership that knows how to grow an economy the right way.

Employment reflects that strength.

Our region has added nearly 14,000 jobs, and Bureau of Labor Statistics data show more than 40,000 additional people working in the Little Rock region today than in 2020.

National recognition continues to follow, with Livability.com naming Little Rock a Top 100 Best Place to Live in 2025 and Forbes Advisor recognizing it as a top destination for young professionals.

But growth only matters if residents can access it.

Workforce development is central to our strategy.

Through Little Rock Career Climb, we partnered with UA Pulaski Tech to create pathways into real careers, and we are scaling that effort through a new regional workforce initiative aligned with labor market demand.

We have a responsibility to ensure that city employment opportunities extend to Little Rock's reentry population.

Too many people face barriers to employment after paying their debt to society.

That is why I have directed our Human Resources team to work with our Departments to expand employment opportunities for our reentry population across City government.

We will lead by example because when people receive a second chance, our workforce grows stronger and our community becomes more resilient.

And as we support our residents, we also support our employees.

This year, we have implemented a Paid Parental Leave policy, providing up to 12 weeks of paid leave for employees across all paths to parenthood.

Affordability remains one of the defining challenges of our time.

Too many families face impossible choices between rent, medicine, utilities and groceries.

When that happens, government has a responsibility to act.

Through a Cities for Financial Empowerment, we are strengthening financial empowerment services to help residents save, manage debt, and build stability.

We are addressing food insecurity head-on with the launch of our first-ever grocery store on wheels, our Mobile Market.

This store will offer affordable, fresh, and nutritious foods to customers in underserved neighborhoods.

This initiative fulfills our promise to make food more accessible.

However, the mobile grocery store is a temporary solution.

Our long-term goal remains to bring brick-and-mortar grocery stores to our food deserts.

I want to thank City Director Kathy Webb for her work in that area.

The City partnered with Samaritan Health Project and Edwards to host food giveaways that provided turkeys and grocery gift cards to hundreds of families.

For many households, that support made the difference between stress and stability during a critical time.

I want to take a moment to recognize Gary Proffitt and the Edwards family for consistently stepping up and partnering with the City throughout the year to support residents.

Their leadership and ongoing commitment show what strong public-private collaboration looks like when it delivers real help to people who need it most.

We are grateful to all our community partners who demonstrate the power of collaboration rooted in compassion.

This is reflected in our Housing Trust Fund. It represents a promise made and a promise kept.

Approved by the Board in 2025, it supports affordable housing, workforce housing, down payment assistance, and neighborhood stabilization.

The workforce housing component is especially important.

Our first responders, teachers, healthcare workers, and city employees deserve safe, high-quality housing in the communities they serve.

Many of you have heard of public-private partnerships, known as P3s.

What we are building goes a step further.

This P4 model brings together public, private, and philanthropic partners.

The Housing Trust Fund is designed to accept investment from all three because the scale of this challenge demands maximum impact.

If you represent a bank, foundation, major employer, or philanthropic organization and want to help fund housing solutions in Little Rock, we will work with you.

For 2026, Realtor.com ranked Little Rock number #14 out of 100 metro areas for housing growth.

That recognition reflects steady progress driven by intentional policy and targeted investment.

We have already helped 480 families access housing assistance and provided \$427,000 in down payment assistance to residents who would otherwise have remained locked out of homeownership.

We must be honest about another reality facing our city: homelessness.

It shows up in our parks, near our libraries, and along our thoroughfares.

We are on track to open the Micro Home Village by late fall. Construction is now roughly 20 percent complete.

Crews have prepared the site, poured the foundation, and completed early phases of plumbing and electrical work.

This is visible progress, and it matters.

Strong neighborhoods anchor a strong city.

Our work to prevent blight delivered real results in 2025.

Through these efforts, we demolished 93 dangerous structures and removed 245 unsafe and vacant properties from our neighborhoods.

These actions strengthened property values and restored pride block by block.

We will broaden our efforts with the launch of the Safe Places Initiative, a coordinated environmental crime prevention program that brings together police, public works, housing, and code enforcement.

This coincides with targeted capital improvements that strengthen safety and visibility across our neighborhoods.

Last year, the City secured a 2 million dollar federal grant to convert 871 streetlights to modern LED fixtures in priority locations.

Our Parks and Recreation Department has delivered real, visible progress across Little Rock. We transformed Kiwanis Park from an underused space into a fully

accessible neighborhood destination where families and residents of all abilities gather every day.

We completed a major renovation at the West Central Sports Complex, supported by \$1.4 million in *American Rescue Plan Act* funding.

We expanded our Summer Day Camp program to serve more than 900 children, giving families peace of mind and kids a healthy place to grow.

At the Jim Dailey Fitness Center, usage surged 67%, confirming that when we invest in quality facilities and programming, residents show up.

We are excited about the progress being made toward our new senior facility at the Centre at University Park, which will open this year.

We now have a bold master plan for 30 Crossing Park that will reimagine Downtown around an 18-acre public space in the heart of the River Market.

With features like a skate park and a fishing wharf that reconnects us to the Arkansas River, this park will shape how people live, work, and gather downtown.

This vision will take time and sustained investment.

Tonight I am launching 30 for 30, a clear goal to raise \$30 million dollars by 2030 to invest in parks across Little Rock through a P4 approach that aligns city resources with philanthropic support and private capital.

This initiative will strengthen our entire parks system, from neighborhood green spaces to signature destinations.

I invite you to join me in supporting the Parks Conservancy, our nonprofit City Parks affiliate, as we begin this once-in-a-generation investment in our downtown future. Representatives are here tonight and ready to help advance this vision forward.

30 Crossing Park anchors our broader Downtown Master Plan, with visible progress already underway at Finley Plaza, the \$25 million renovation of River Market Hall, continued revitalization along Capitol Avenue, and construction of the new voter approved District Courts building.

That same intentional strategy guides our work along Historic West Ninth Street, where we will see a revival that restores the corridor as a living center of culture, creativity, and economic opportunity.

As the capital city, Little Rock must also lead in planning for the future.

Last year, we established a transformative partnership with the Clinton Foundation and ENFRA, a local energy firm, to create the Clinton Sustainable Energy District in the heart of downtown.

This will deliver a modern energy system that positions Little Rock as a leader in clean, cost-effective electricity while reducing long-term costs for major downtown institutions.

This work builds on momentum already underway.

At the Port, we are constructing a 4.9-megawatt solar array to power roughly 70% of municipal operations.

I also want to thank our Sustainability Commission and City Directors Capi Peck and Kathy Webb for their leadership in advancing Little Rock's first Sustainability Action Plan.

It sets clear benchmarks, including transitioning half of the city's vehicle fleet to electric by 2030, and moves sustainability from aspiration to accountability.

Through the steady leadership of Susan Altrui, the Little Rock Zoo is embarking on an ambitious expansion that strengthens its role as a regional destination and a treasured community institution.

This \$12 million investment marks the zoo's first major expansion in more than a decade and coincides with its 100th anniversary.

Parks do not thrive on plans alone.

Downtown does not transform through blueprints alone.

Institutions like the Little Rock Zoo succeed when residents show up.

Progress becomes real only when people step into it, shape it, and take ownership of their city's future.

Civic engagement matters.

Cities succeed because residents show up, speak up, and partner to move them forward.

Little Rock's next chapter will take shape not just through what we build, but through how deeply our residents engage in building it together.

We already see this happening.

Graduates of R.O.C.K. Academy are now in leadership roles on our boards and commissions.

That is how civic trust grows: one resident at a time.

That belief propels civic engagement in this city.

Tonight, I am proud to announce the launch of the Little Rock Civic Innovation Challenge.

We invite Little Rock residents to partner directly with public institutions to solve real, everyday challenges.

Participating partners will include a number of public entities.

Each partner will put forward a specific problem they are working to solve.

Residents will respond with ideas grounded in research and lived experience.

The strongest solutions will move beyond proposals, with winning teams working side by side with these public entities to help implement their ideas in real time.

More details on this challenge will come.

This is what modern civic engagement looks like.

The government defines the challenge. Residents help design the solution. Progress follows.

Last year, the Board invested close to \$2.1 million to purchase five new garbage trucks.

That investment replaces aging equipment and expands route coverage, giving our crews the tools they need to deliver reliable service.

Our operations are smarter.

After a successful pilot of new routing software for our garbage trucks, we will now implement the software across our entire fleet.

By moving sanitation operations into the digital age, we shorten time on the road, reduce wear on expensive equipment, and deliver better results for our neighborhoods.

Promise made. Promise kept.

That same focus on reliability and quality extends to our infrastructure.

The City invested almost \$1 million dollars to purchase a new asphalt milling machine and an asphalt zipper machine.

This will enable crews to complete larger in-house surface repairs rather than limiting work to just pothole filling.

This investment strengthens our ability to restore streets more efficiently, extending the life of our roads, and delivering smoother, safer driving conditions.

This is engagement in action. We listen. We invest.

We transform city government.

Technology plays a critical role in resident access.

Through our partnership with Apptegy, we launched a new all-in-one City of Little Rock mobile app earlier today.

This platform centralizes city services, real-time updates, alerts, and key information.

Download it now in your appstore.

Our Treasury Management Department is modernizing how residents pay city fees. Expanded payment options and streamlined processes will make it easier to manage licenses, fees, and services with less friction and greater convenience.

We listen, adapt, and use technology to make everyday interactions more straightforward and more reliable for residents.

Through targeted community development, we ensure no neighborhood is overlooked, and no one is left behind.

By focusing on Wards 1, 2, 6, and 7, we are removing barriers by waiving permit fees, making it easier to invest where it matters most.

It is our obligation to open the doors for all entrepreneurs.

I am announcing the creation of a small business opportunity certification program to identify vendors ready for work with the City.

This addresses gaps and expands opportunity.

This work builds on the continued success of our BUILD and Emprende small business incubators.

Little Rock is a national leader in equipping first-time entrepreneurs with the tools and support they need to succeed.

Yet, our accomplishments go far beyond any single program or milestone.

From neighborhood revitalization to civic engagement to economic momentum, we are doing the work, and the best is still ahead of us.

When we keep our promises, we unlock the full potential of a capital city that serves as a regional center for health care, government, finance, education, arts, and culture.

We prove that progress is not accidental. It is earned through discipline, partnership, and follow-through.

Travel + Leisure may call Little Rock a “best kept secret,” but I need every one of you to help make sure it stays a secret no longer.

Talk about this city.

Invest in this city.

Defend this city.

Believe in this city.

We have grown forward despite historic flooding and winter storms.

We have grown forward despite a catastrophic tornado.

We have grown forward despite a global health pandemic that tested every institution and every family.

Through it all, Little Rock did not retreat. We adapted. We persevered. We moved forward together.

Let us continue the work.

There has never been more reason to believe in what this city can become.

Little Rock’s story is still being written. And together, we will make the next chapter our strongest yet!

Thank you. And God Bless Little Rock.