



Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Linda Gorton
Mayor

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Contact:	Susan Straub	Craig Cammack
	Office: 859-258-3111	Office: 859-258-3117
	Cell: 859-576-2564	Cell: 859-608-7911

State of the City/County

By Linda Gorton

Good afternoon and thank you to the Lexington Forum, and Forum President **Ryan Kelsch**, for again hosting our State of the City / State of the County speech.

And welcome to Congressman **Andy Barr**; Legislators **Stan Lee** and **Reggie Thomas**; members of our judiciary, **Larry Van Meter**, **Lucy Van Meter** and **Pam Goodwine**, our Commonwealth's Attorney **Lou Anna Red Corn** and our PVA, **David O'Neill**. Thank you all for coming!

I welcome this annual opportunity to report back to citizens on the well-being of our hometown.

We've made a lot of progress over the past year ... and there are many people to thank. I'd like to start by recognizing members of our Urban County Council, my partners in progress.

Please stand, each of you, as I say your names, and if everyone would please hold their applause until I introduce our Council ...

- Vice Mayor **Steve Kay**
- Council member-at-Large **Richard Moloney**
- Council member-at-Large **Chuck Ellinger**
- First District Councilmember **James Brown**

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- Second District **Josh McCurn**
- Third District **Jake Gibbs**
- Fourth District **Susan Lamb**
- Fifth District **Bill Farmer, Jr.**
- Sixth District **Angela Evans**
- Seventh District **Preston Worley**
- Eighth District **Fred Brown**
- Ninth District **Jennifer Mossotti**
- Tenth District **Amanda Mays Bledsoe**
- Eleventh District **Jennifer Reynolds**

and 12th District Councilmember **Kathy Plomin**

Councilmembers, today we will take a few minutes to look back at the progress we've made over the past year, and to touch on some of the new ideas we're working on.

- Then, it's full speed ahead! It's a new year ... a new decade ... with new opportunities ... and new challenges. We have hit the ground running!

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Citizens often tell me that they want the best for their City, as I suspect all 425 of you do. So let's talk about how we're getting there ... making our city safer; building for progress; and continuing to improve our quality of life.

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I want to talk first about making our City safer, and I'm using a broad definition of safety.

For example, **opioid addiction** ... it's a critical public safety issue ... it is literally a matter of life and death.

We have a long way to go, but we have made some progress here over the past year ... fatal overdoses are on the decline!

- We had 187 overdose deaths in 2017; last year there were 112 ... that's real progress. A 40% drop!
- And Firefighters report that opioid-related emergency runs fell just over 25% in 2019, when compared to 2018.

Many people credit the decrease in overdoses to the availability of **naloxone**.

- Late in 2018, our Department of Social Services, working with the Health Department, won a \$2 million grant to address opioid abuse.
- Thank you to Social Services Commissioner **Chris Ford** and **Amy Baker**, who coordinates our Substance Use Disorder Intervention Program.
- In the first 6 months of the program, we distributed more than 1,900 free Naloxone kits to local residents ... *including me* ... with the health department training each person on how to stop an overdose. The Health Department has also distributed additional kits funded through other sources.
- Naloxone is now in the Mayor's Office, in the Courthouses, in our police, fire and sheriff's vehicles, and in many homes and churches.
- Harm reduction services, like naloxone and the Health Department's effective needle exchange program, are important. We have an opportunity to prevent disease and to save lives.

I have also dedicated a staff member in the Mayor's Office to developing strategies that can help Lexington overcome the opioid epidemic.

Andrea James, my community response strategist, completed an examination of best practices across the country, and of the services available in our community.

Her work has drawn the community together, for example during National Recovery Month in September, and has uncovered the need for more primary prevention.

In the next few weeks I will appoint a multi-disciplinary task force that will use Andrea's research to craft a comprehensive **action plan** for Lexington to offer effective help to addicts and their friends and families. A community that is out of the grasp of addiction will be a safer community.

Community Paramedicine, a program that equips our firefighters to take a comprehensive approach to patient care, is also making Lexington safer.

These firefighters help patients who frequently call 9-1-1 with chronic, non-emergency problems, for example, mobility.

Through home visits, education, and individual assessments, Community Paramedicine offers a new level of care. Patients get the help they need for the best overall outcome, and not just a short-term solution.

For example, the Community Paramedicine team attempts to make contact with every non-fatal opioid overdose in Fayette County.

As a registered nurse, I understand how important Community Paramedicine is.

This outstanding program started in 2017, funded by a grant. A tight City budget in 2019 meant the City was only able to fund the program for six months.

I reached out to our three main hospitals, and led negotiations to bring them together. They have generously agreed to provide \$200,000 to fund the program this year. **A true community-driven solution.**

We have representatives of our hospitals here today ... thank you to **Dan Goulson**, CHI Saint Joseph Health market chief medical officer; **Angela Lang**, Chief Experience and Operations Officer at UK HealthCare; and **Karen Hill**, Chief Operations Officer at Baptist Health Lexington. Let's give them a round of **applause**.

Fire Chief **Kristin Chilton** says prior to the start of Community Paramedicine we anticipated needing to add a new ambulance to our fleet every two years to keep pace with patient demand.

- Now, there has been a 15.5% swing in EMS responses, which has reduced our need to add ambulances to our fleet.

Chief, congratulations to you and to Assistant Chief **Chad Traylor**, who runs the Community Paramedicine program ... it makes our community safer.

When many people think of public safety, they, of course, think of crime. Our city is one of the safest cities its size in the country when it comes to violent crimes.

- Crime in 2019 was significantly lower than the average of the preceding 5 years. Regionally, the crime rate is significantly lower here than in Louisville or Cincinnati.

Police Chief **Lawrence Weathers** credits our neighborhood resource officers, who assist with keeping crime low by maintaining direct contact with citizens to address suspected criminal activity. He also credits increasingly strong partnerships with local, state, and federal law enforcement officers and prosecutors.

Public safety also means preventing crime. ONE Lexington and our Partners for Youth Foundation are imbedded in our Winburn, West End, Cardinal Valley and Gainesway neighborhoods, creating meaningful partnerships to enhance opportunities and quality of life for neighbors.

Law enforcement is also working with a broad coalition of neighbors, the faith community, social service agencies, schools and other partners through the **City's One Lexington and Safety Net Initiative**.

Safety Net seeks to reduce the potential adverse experiences that may lead young people into a life of violent crime.

House by house, law enforcement officers and Safety Net are taking a simple message into the neighborhoods and homes of those threatened by violence.

- Their message: risky, threatening behavior often leads to gun violence, and even death. This is preventable and it has to stop.
- We have the community resources to help. Those who are interested in seeking out available resources and opportunities can be contacted through Safety Net.

I think the best way for me to talk about this is to give you an example.

- Recently, our police contacted a family who had received threats of gun violence because of an on-going dispute involving one of the family members.
- Safety Net Street Outreach Worker, **Julius Johnson** with the Lexington Rescue Mission, spoke to the mother, who said her household included several children. The mother said her family needed resources related to housing, trauma services, educational support and mentoring.
- This family was then connected to Pastor **Winston Taylor** and his Seventh Day Adventist Church family. Pastor Taylor and his congregation are now providing needed assistance, meeting this family's basic needs, getting them relocated to different housing, offering counseling and support to the mother on ways to care for her children, as well as providing supportive services and mentoring the children.
 - Thank you to Pastor **Taylor, Julius**, and **Laura Hatfield**, our Director of One Lexington and Safety Net.
- Thanks also to Fayette County Public Schools and many other partners, including the City, who are working on the Schools' **Promise Neighborhoods Initiative** to support children and families living in some downtown and North Lexington neighborhoods.

This is hard work. We are pulling together as a city to overcome these challenges and ensure all of our children have the opportunity to succeed.

We also face challenges at our **jail**, and we are continuing to work through them.

I have spent a good deal of time at the jail over the past year, talking one-on-one with our corrections officers to better understand their concerns, and working with management to implement change.

We have made progress. On December 24, 2019, our population dipped below our capacity of 1,268 for first time since March of 2017. One year ago ... January 21, 2019 ... our inmate population was 1,440. After working with the state to reduce our inmate population, today we are at 1270.

We've made closing the gap in recruiting and hiring corrections officers a central focus of our efforts.

Our jail is critically important to our public safety. Despite the challenges, most officers continue to perform their duties in a professional manner, and that's a testimony to them. It is because of this professionalism that we operated a safe and effective detention facility for the inmate population and officers, even when the numbers were challenging.

I am committed to keeping the lines of communication open and to keep making improvements. We must continue to do the hard work of digging in systematically, and finding real solutions that last.

I also want to recognize our E-9-1-1 Division, another key part of our public safety efforts. Director **Robert Stack** joins us today.

- E-9-1-1 recently won accreditation from some tough critics ... the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. The gold standard in public safety, and our center is the first in Kentucky to win such accreditation.
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Making Lexington safer is also reflected in several new facilities:

- We opened a **new fire station** in 2019... our 24th ... and it's offering a new level of protection to the Masterson Station Neighborhood. Since it opened last August, Station 24 has responded to almost 650 fire and medical calls.
 - In November we opened a **new salt barn** ... our 2nd ... and it enables us to serve the southern part of our City faster, improving safety during bad weather.
 - And we will soon open a **new police canine facility** ... it replaces our current facility, built in 1968, and will help us extend the length of service of our highly trained, and highly valued K-9 officers.
 - Construction projects do not have to be big and expensive to be effective ... our fire department installed over 8,000 grant-funded smoke alarms in 2019. Our smoke alarm program is credited with saving 13 lives.
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Our consent decree projects -- the biggest infrastructure project in our city's history -- are about public safety at its most fundamental level. These court-ordered projects to rebuild our city's leaking sanitary sewers protect our environment and improve our water quality.

- With about half of the 116 planned projects complete or under construction, we are today \$83 million under original cost estimates.
 - The Consent Decree identified 111 places where sewers regularly overflowed into our streams, fields and streets. In the seven years since we started work on the projects, 56 of those overflow sites have been abated.
 - There's a lot of work remaining on the consent decree projects, and a very challenging year ahead, as we move into congested areas like Euclid Avenue. Thanks to everyone for their patience and cooperation.
 - We appreciate **Charlie Martin**, our Director of the Division of Water Quality, and **Nancy Albright**, our Commissioner of Environmental Quality and Public Works, for their oversight of this vast environmental project.
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While I'm talking about the environment, I want you to know we have been working on paper recycling for several months.

Tomorrow, we will have a next step announcement. People frequently ask me about paper recycling, and I'm excited to have an answer for them. For those of you who have been stockpiling paper recyclables for months, it's almost time to clean out the garage!

Public safety and quality of life projects give us a competitive advantage as the Council and I work to attract and grow jobs.

First, you may be aware that we recently entered into a partnership with the University of Kentucky that is reinventing the wheel in terms of our economic development opportunities.

- UK has given the city 250 acres for economic development in exchange for ownership of some sections of streets near campus.
 - Our development plan for the Coldstream property includes high tech agriculture, headquarter operations, small manufacturing operations and biotech industries.
 - We've already landed the first company to locate in our new industrial park ... a global headquarters.
 - And right next door to Coldstream, this year we celebrated the opening of the new **Customer Experience Center at LBX**, a \$10 million facility where dealers and customers demonstrate equipment and learn more about products.
 - LBX expects to welcome 800 people to the facility each year ... that's great news for the business, and for our city. Congratulations to **Eric Sauvage**, President and CEO.
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UK, Alltech and the state are partners in our work to become a **high tech agriculture hub**. We are well positioned to be a national leader in this field.

- Thanks to **Dean Nancy Cox** of the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment; and **Brian Lawless**, from Alltech, for joining us today. Agriculture Commissioner **Ryan Quarles** and the **Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development** are also working with us.

We need to remember ... our farms **are** businesses. They add to our economy and they produce jobs. That's one of many reasons I strongly support our **Purchase of Development Rights** program ... it protects our farmland.

Todd Clark is here with us today. Todd is a first generation farmer. He raises pastured poultry, grass-fed/finished beef, pastured turkeys, and **hemp**. Todd is a busy man!

- Todd is a founding member of the Bluegrass Farm to Table Advisory Committee. **Ashton Potter Wright** in my office leads this organization that works to help farmers find new markets for their products.
- Currently, Ashton conservatively estimates that her efforts have contributed to \$4.1 million in sales for Kentucky farmers since 2014.

Altogether, the agricultural operations that are conducted in our county have a \$2.3 billion annual impact on our economy.

As we seek to attract and grow new jobs, we must also ensure we have the workforce available to meet their needs. Workforce development is an essential part of any type of successful economic development, and it is a priority I share with councilmembers.

From executive-level talent, to entry jobs ... *and all are important* ... Lexington's workforce development, coordinated by **Elodie Dickinson**, our Director of Business and Workforce Engagement, focuses on local needs ... the needs of our employers and workers.

- Since 2017, through training programs funded by city workforce grants, we have placed 457 people in jobs ... *and we're just getting started*.
 - Grants have been made to eight agencies to provide training in a number of skills, including Commercial Drivers Licenses, entrepreneurship, fiber optic installation, forklift, skilled trades, customer service, and more.
 - Representatives of two of these agencies are with us today. Welcome to **Erin Rouse**, chair of Jubilee Jobs, and **Bruce Maybriar**, director of Professional Development at the Building Institute of Central Kentucky.
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Our gigabit fiber build-out of the entire urban services area will be complete this summer ... *ahead of schedule*. This information super highway makes Lexington even more attractive to business, a clear competitive advantage as we work to attract jobs.

Lexington will be one of a very few communities its size nationwide with high speed fiber capability throughout the entire city.

MetroNet has installed almost 1,000 total miles of fiber, an investment of \$80 million in permanently installed infrastructure.

Congratulations to **Kris Smith**, and **Allison Helton**, and **Darrick Zucco**, who are here today representing MetroNet, and to our CIO **Aldona Valicenti**, who has worked with them every step of the way.

High quality of life, and low cost of living are the reasons many companies and many individuals are attracted to Lexington ... that's a perfect combination, and it's my job to make sure it stays that way.

Several of the construction projects we have invested in over the past year improve quality of life:

- The new **Shillito playground** welcomes all children, including those with disabilities. It was built by volunteers ... **800 of them**. I'm proud to be part of a City where 800 people will volunteer to build a playground.

- We completed our **100th mile of trails** ... a real milestone. And there's more to come! 2020 is going to be a big year for trails:
 - This summer we will be building a bridge over Man-O-War on Brighton Rail Trail; finishing the final leg of the Legacy Trail; and building several sections of Town Branch Trail, located west of downtown;
 - And we're ramping up construction of the hub of our trail network, **Town Branch Commons**. It winds through downtown.
 - Once Town Branch Commons is complete, Lexington will have **22 miles of uninterrupted trail** that stretches from downtown into the beautiful Bluegrass countryside.

And very soon, people walking or cycling on Town Branch Commons trail along Vine Street will enjoy a special treat ... the **Breaking the Bronze Ceiling sculpture**.

The sculpture will be an important part of our celebration later this year of the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, giving women the right to vote.

The sculpture will stand on the plaza of the Big Blue Building ... *thank you to Dudley Webb and the Webb companies.*

Today we have guests with us who have a special relationship to the suffragist era. **Caroline Anne Clay**, an 8th grader at The Lexington School, is a part of the Central Kentucky Clay family that included **Laura Clay**, one of the most important suffragists in the South ... *now that really makes history come alive!*

Caroline Anne is here with her parents, **Sarah and Brutus Clay** ... thank you all for joining us!

And thank you to Councilmembers **Mossotti** and **Plomin** for their work on Breaking the Bronze Ceiling.

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Art -- like this new suffragist sculpture -- enriches our quality of life, and we have started work on an exciting new public art master plan that will guarantee new public art throughout our City.

- Make sure you participate in our public art survey ... there's information on each table today about how it works. We need to hear from you as we put this plan together.

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Like art, our festivals also enhance our quality of life.

- Fireworks are a treasured part of our most popular festival, the Fourth of July Festival. This year, RJ Corman made it possible to once again enjoy a big fireworks display downtown.
- **William Downey**, Corman's Director of Government Affairs, has joined us today. William, thank you, and thank **Ed Quinn** and everyone at RJ Corman ... the fireworks were just great!

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Work is ongoing on the expansion of what we're now proud to call **Central Bank Center**. With a bigger convention center and more hotels we will be able to compete for nearly **90%** of national convention business, compared to **65%** today.

- And two new hotels have just come on line at **City Center** ... *congratulations to the Webbs and the Greers.*

Those new hotel rooms will also come in handy next November, when we step back into the international spotlight for the **Breeders' Cup** and Breeders' Cup Festival.

Another factor in our quality of life is the diversity we enjoy. *Lexington welcomes everyone.*

Last year we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our Fairness Ordinance. We received our highest score ever from the civil rights organization that annually ranks cities based on how inclusive they are of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities.

We got a 93 out of 100 this year, and we have a committee focused on improvements for next year ... we're after a perfect score!

Lexington also welcomes **veterans**. We're making Lexington even friendlier to veterans.

From the Kentucky Veterans Hall of Fame, Honor Flights and the annual Week of Valor, we've greatly improved the support and recognition of our veterans.

One important step forward is we effectively ended veteran homelessness ... the first city in Kentucky to do so.

As a military spouse and a military mom, I understand what being in the military means, and how important it is for a community to support our veterans and their families.

Thank you to our former Fire Chief **Keith Jackson** for being here today to represent our veterans ... retired from the Army, Jackson is now our state's Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. *Congratulations, Keith!*

All of the programs and projects I have talked about today got their start in the City budget. Putting together a responsible budget that meets the most pressing needs of our City is our most important responsibility.

This year my staff and I organized citizen-led work groups to improve our budgeting process and study our revenue.

And we asked our 3,000-plus employees to "ReThink Lex" ... to make suggestions on the work we do, and how we do it. We got 1,000 suggestions, and we're still reading through them ... thanks to our wonderful employees and to **CIO Valicenti** for coordinating this process.

In a few short weeks our budgeting for FY 21 will begin in earnest. Because of these work groups, we have a better process; and suggestions from our employees will mean a more efficient government.

Strong financial management makes it possible for me to report to you today that the state of our city and county is sound. We're moving forward, tackling our challenges and celebrating our successes. Our city is growing and vibrant.

In other cities, **many opportunities are missed because they come dressed in overalls and look like work.**

In Lexington, we're not afraid of work, and we don't miss opportunities for our City.

Thank you.

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