

2023 State of the City Address

“Peoria – Positioned for Growth and Prosperity”

Cindy, thank you for that kind introduction and many thanks to Hanson Professional Services for serving as the title sponsor for today’s event. A tremendous thanks to all of the sponsors that, together, have allowed this activity to take place.

Good Evening Everyone. Thank you so much for your attendance at today’s State of the City event. Many thanks to Joshua Gunn and the Peoria Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event in this beautiful, iconic Peoria location. In my first year as mayor, two years ago, we were at the spectacular Dozer Park. Last year, we were at the renowned Scottish Rite Theatre, and today at the amazing Luthy Botanical Gardens. This Chamber team continues to think out-of-the-box in showcasing Peoria’s wonderful amenities.

I’d like to thank and acknowledge my colleagues on the Peoria City Council that have joined us today. Please stand and remain standing as I call your name. First, our two **newly** elected council members, Councilwoman, Dr. Bernice Gordon-Young, **and** Councilman, Attorney Mike Vespa. Also with us are Councilmembers Tim Riggenbach, Denise Jackson, Andre Allen, Zach Oyler, John Kelly, and Dr. Kiran Velpula. Thank you all for your leadership in service to Peoria.

I’d like to ask any and all public elected officials present today to please stand. We thank each of you for your ongoing partnership in supporting the needs of the city of Peoria. Thank you for your exemplary leadership.

Many thanks to our City Manager, Patrick Urich, who is responsible for all policy implementation and city, leading 688 employees. I can honestly say that we are very blessed to have one of the best city managers in the state of Illinois and he works to hire the best leadership team and staff that work hard **every** day to keep our city running smoothly. Last year, we welcomed a new Assistant City Manager, Kimberly Richardson, who oversees Economic Development and is serving as the Project Manager for our new 2023 Strategic Planning Process, **Creating our Roadmap to the Future.**

Lastly, I’d like to thank all of the volunteers that serve on our many City Commissions as they play a crucial role in the joint governance of our city.

The theme that rings in my address today is that **Peoria is well positioned for Growth and Prosperity.**

And what a beautiful place to be today while speaking of **growth and prosperity.**

While I am not a botanist by any measure, I learned some time ago that the growth of flowers is generated by a single master gene called A-Pet-a-la 1. The A-pet-a-la 1 triggers the reproductive development of the plant, telling it when it’s time to start blossoming. A plant with few or no flowers has an inactive A-Pet-a-la 1 while a plant with many flowers has an active A-Pet-a-la 1.

I believe with all my heart and soul, that Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** has been activated. It has been activated in our healthcare system with the construction of OSF's new world class Cancer Institute, in the welcoming of Carle Health to our area and its expanded mental health division Trillium, in Peoria County's building of a new city-county Health Department, in the production of many new physicians by the University of Illinois Peoria College of Medicine, and in the expanded services of our public and private healthcare providers.

Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** has been activated in a wide variety of new small businesses with diverse ownership and new channels for reaching and interacting with their customers.

Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** has been activated in our many education institutions providing new opportunities for student learning and career opportunities for faculty, administration, support staff, security, and technology professionals.

Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** has been activated in our manufacturing industries like Natural Fiber Welding, Kering and Maui Jim Eyewear, Pringle Robotics, Komatsu, new prospects in the Electric Vehicle industry, and - yes - Caterpillar. Caterpillar continues to employ more than 12,000 workers in its Peoria area manufacturing-related facilities.

Frederick Douglas said we must be makers of our own shoes. Peoria has a long history as a manufacturing leader and the current landscape reflects a trending **rebirth**.

Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** is active. The flowers are blooming and Peoria, Illinois is well positioned for **growth and prosperity!**

(Pause)

Allow me to share some numbers with you that further support my optimism.

In 2022, the city's overall revenues totaled \$282 million, **up** 12% from 2021. The 2023 revised budget is a conservative \$265 million. 52% of these revenues come from local taxes, licenses, fines, and fees; another 27% comes from the state of Illinois, and the remaining from federal and other sources.

Because we strongly exceeded our revenue projections in the past two years, we were able to **substantially** increase our general revenue fund. As a result, our general fund is now about 50% of the level of our operating expenses, which is **twice** the 25% minimum policy level.

What does this mean?

Well, it means that the budget **surplus** from 2022 can be used, beginning 2024, to pay more toward public safety pensions and still exceed the fund balance policy.

It means that the city has several years of fiscal **certainty** and a **buffer** in the event of economic turndown or recession. This allows us time, **now**, to collaborate with our partners to build and

strengthen our infrastructure, our industrial parks, our business attraction and support services, and tap into additional OPM – Other People’s Money.

Ten percent of this year’s budget comes from federal sources. We are working to increase that by submitting numerous applications for competitive federal funding.

American Rescue Plan Act or ARPA funding has had a huge **positive** impact on our budget. We will continue to utilize these funds through 2024 and make up for the **end** of these funds by tapping other grant and funding sources.

The city's **capital** budget in 2022 was \$60 million dollars, which was a 20-year high for the city of Peoria. We budgeted another \$65 million in the 2023 capital budget, making a total capital investment of \$125 million dollars over the last two years. The vast majority of this investment is in our roads, sidewalks, smart street lighting, facilities, and equipment.

My friends, the State of the City of Peoria is STRONG. (Pause)

Now, let’s talk about some of these infrastructure projects.

As you are aware, our Midwest climate is delightful, but it can be very hard on our roadways. City staff spend a lot of time filling potholes – but oftentimes we need to do more – and we have some major **road** repair projects going on.

While I don’t have time to detail them, road projects include Western Avenue, Glen Avenue, Allen Road, Pioneer Parkway, University Street, Orange Prairie Road, Nebraska, Laramie, MacArthur Highway, and several more.

Bridge work on the Bob Michael and McCluggage bridges and the Rock Island Greenway Project.

Many thanks to our state and county partners.

The city is spending over \$3 million in sidewalk improvements.

Many thanks to our federal partners.

Collaboration is the way to get things done!

I want to give special recognition to the city’s Public Works Director, Rick Powers, and his great team. Thanks to all of their hard work, Peoria is becoming a more drivable, bikeable and walkable city for our residents, visitors and businesses!

Let’s talk for a minute about rail – I’m optimistic that passenger rail service will return to Peoria! Several important milestones have been reached in this effort:

- A feasibility study conducted by IDOT determined the Peoria to Chicago route is feasible and that projected ridership levels are sufficient to warrant consideration.
- IDOT has since included this route into its State Rail Plan.

- An Economic Development Analysis determined that the project could catalyze additional investment in the region and support workforce needs, business, and tourism.
- A collaborative application was submitted to join the Federal Railroad Administration's **new** Corridor Identification and Development Program, the gateway to federal funding and technical support to implement new intercity rail projects. Awards are expected this September.
- The application and the project have received strong endorsements from Illinois political leaders on both sides of the aisle, as well as business, education, labor and non-profit leaders throughout the state.
- We will keep you posted as things further develop.

The city partnered with I-3 Broadband on a Connect Illinois Broadband Grant application to install \$13 million in broadband infrastructure throughout the 61605 zip code. This is an important step in promoting digital equity and access throughout the city.

We led a multi-agency consortium of local governments to apply to the Federal Highway Administration for about \$11 million dollars in electric vehicle charging stations and infrastructure for this area. This includes fast charging EV stations in downtown and central Peoria; our parks, schools, and key public areas, thereby supporting the environment and SMART City Development.

Many of you are familiar with the **Choose Greater Peoria** effort, led by local business leaders, and recently launched to help attract workforce talent to our area. It emphasizes what a great place Peoria is to raise a family, the low cost of living, the opportunity to live in a generous and giving community, and the great quality of life we enjoy here. The city is aligned with and strongly supports this effort.

We are so excited about the growth of our healthcare industry in Peoria. The OSF Cancer Institute, a \$237 million dollar investment, will open next year. UnityPoint is now Carle Health in Peoria, and we look for many exciting opportunities to sprout from this premier organization.

Our City Council approved, this year, a program to incentivize small biotech businesses to utilize vacant commercial and office spaces within the city.

We issued \$1.4 million in RISE Grants to 118 small businesses – 80% which are female, minority or veteran owned. Businesses in many different sectors received funds, including hospitality, start-ups, restaurants, lawncare, gyms, daycare, retail, barbershops and more.

One of the recipients of a RISE Grant is Casa De Arte, located on the south edge of the warehouse district. I'm so pleased that the **owners of Casa De Arte, Arturo and Carla Vargas**, are able to join us today. Arturo is a lifelong Peoria resident, an artist, and, who, like me, grew up on Peoria's south side and graduated from Manual High School. His wife Carla is from the same town in Jalisco, Mexico, where Arturo's family came from. Jalisco is the tequila capital of the

world. So, it's not surprising that Casa de Arte features a wide variety of tequila, some great artwork, and some very delicious Mexican food. They are creating something special – a place where Latinos from all countries can gather, with others, to celebrate their rich cultures. Arturo and Carla, please stand. Thank you for choosing Peoria.

To help to grow our workforce, the city continues to partner with the Regional Workforce Alliance, the CEO Council, and Illinois Central College. The Alliance works to systemically connect employers, educators, and community-based organizations with high school graduates, the under-credentialed, and adults with multiple barriers to ensure that at least 60% of the region's population has the required certifications to obtain gainful employment.

The Mayor's Summer Youth Employment and Internship Program enrolled 100 youth, ages 14-18, this summer. These are students that attend public schools throughout the city who are placed at worksites within the city (Public Works, Police and Fire Departments, Information Services), and non-profit organizations in Peoria. I thank these organizations for giving these youth their first job experience. Participating youth earn between \$11-\$16 per hour and work 20 hours per week for 8 weeks. Most importantly, the students gain important job and life skills under a safe and supportive, supervised environment. I am a product of such an opportunity many years ago in Peoria. I know it makes a difference.

In another promising development, the city of Peoria received a grant from PNC Bank Foundation to implement a Role Model Project featuring positive African American role models that will connect with youth in economically distressed areas of the city. The project will feature 100 individuals over this next year where selected individuals will be featured on the mayor's web pages and in events held at schools, community organizations, and various locations throughout the city. The role models will serve in a variety of ways, as speakers, mentors, testimonials, career highlights, and resources for youth opportunities. The program will launch with a press event in late July or early August of this year.

Many thanks to PNC Bank Foundation for this tremendous opportunity.

(Neighborhood Investments)

Like road projects, there are too many community development projects for me to describe in any detail. There are challenges within some of our neighborhoods.

Even though Peoria is known for relatively affordable real estate, far too many of our residents are paying too much of their income on housing.

The city has introduced new programs to help homeowners in our neighborhoods live more safely and securely. For example:

The city partnered with the Health Department to fund a match for their Lead Abatement Program which removes lead from properties. In 2022, twelve lead removal projects were completed.

The city will replace approximately 40 roofs for income-eligible residents using \$350,000 of Community Development Block Grant funds and \$300,000 through a competitive grant award from the Illinois Housing Development Authority.

The city provided \$600 to each of approximately 275 residents to help with utility payments during the previous winter months.

The city awarded 34 Home Down Payment Assistance Grants and over \$200,000 for 40 Neighborhood Mini grants to support neighborhood associations. We provided more than \$1 million dollars in grants for capital repairs to 14 local non-profits that serve low-income residents.

Like most places in America, Peoria has some homelessness.

The city supported the efforts of Phoenix Community Development Services with \$600,000 in HOME funds towards their Madison III housing for the homeless project. We provided another \$200,000 for a workforce development hub for those clients receiving homeless services.

The city demolished long-time eyesores and neighborhood hazards, Harrison and McKinley Schools, for a total cost of approximately \$2.4 million. We are grateful for the supplementary federal support provided for those projects.

The city's Land Bank assisted 114 residential demolitions, 99 parcel acquisitions, and 32 side lot transfers.

And **BREAKING NEWS**: the city supported three housing development project applications sent to the Illinois Housing Development Authority for 9% tax credit funding and we just learned last week that two of the three were approved for funding – a \$15 million dollar, 50-unit multi-family housing development near St. Ann's Church on Peoria's southside (a project of Peoria Opportunities Foundation and Pivotal Development); and a \$24 million dollar, 55-unit, permanent housing development for adults and families experiencing homelessness at the former Methodist College Building (a project of Phoenix Community Development Services).

Only 18 projects were funded throughout Illinois and Peoria and the City of Chicago were the **only two cities** to get **two** projects funded in this competitive process. We are very excited about these opportunities for Peoria residents.

A thriving downtown is central to a thriving city.

To help make Peoria's downtown more business friendly and drivable, design work is complete on the Adams and Jefferson conversion to two-way streets from Fayette to Kumpf. The project will be bid in the fall of this year with construction continuing through 2024.

The city is finalizing the Riverfront Master Plan – a renovation plan for Riverfront Park from the Bob Michel Bridge to the Murray Baker Bridge. I expect this plan to be revealed to the community as soon as the end of this month.

Downtown and the warehouse district are becoming super popular places to live. Developers have constructed or have approved plans for over 1,000 residential units and you can expect more to come.

Another downtown anchor is the Peoria Riverfront Museum, a cultural hub with exciting exhibits and frequent events for all ages.

You should know that a state grant of \$25 million dollars has been allocated for the reconstruction of Main Street. The entire project from Main at Water Street up to Farmington Road comes at a cost of about \$52 million and this grant will take us almost half-way there. Many thanks to Leader Jehan Gordon-Booth for securing this funding and our other state legislators for their support.

Our largest City Commission is a joint effort with Peoria County – The Joint Commission on Racial Justice and Equity.

The RJE Commission has eight areas of focus for which great disparities, based on race, exist.

The RJE Commission’s 2022 Annual Report, released a few months ago and available on the city and county’s websites, established the baseline of these inequities in the city and county. In every category studied, the Commission found significant racial disparities.

Our African American community experiences shorter and less healthy lives; they live with more poverty and environmental hazards; they have lower levels of achievement at school which leads to lower paying jobs; and they have more trouble with the law.

The data are disturbing and troubling – but rather than ignoring these problems, we are shining a light on them and, as a community, trying to resolve these issues. We have much work to do to achieve equity – it’s very difficult work, but we, here in Peoria, are committed to closing these disparity gaps because that’s what happens in the **City of Gratitude**.

(Public Safety and Crime Reduction)

The Peoria Police Department, led by Chief Eric Echevarria, is making a positive impact on our community. The department has been focusing on reducing gun violence, fostering community partnerships, improving traffic safety, and recruiting new officers.

Because we still have far too many guns on the street, the Peoria Police Department placed special emphasis on gun-related crimes in 2022. The results were encouraging as Peoria saw a 28% decrease in shooting incidents in 2022 compared to 2021. We also saw a 24% decrease in homicide victims in 2022 compared to the prior year.

This is good progress – but we are doing more. In the fall of last year, we announced the formation of the Peoria Area Federal Firearms Task Force – PAFF. PAFF is a collaborative effort between federal, state and local law enforcement designed to combat and prevent violent firearm crime. The PAFF is comprised of an assigned federal prosecutor, agents from the ATF, FBI, and sworn federal task force officers from the Peoria Police Department, the Illinois State Police, the Peoria County Sheriff’s department, and the Illinois Department of Corrections. The PAFF pools the resources from each of its respective agencies and pursues effective strategies to disrupt perpetrators of gun violence. There is no other like it in the nation.

In March 2023, the City received notification of funding for the creation of the Greater Peoria Auto Crimes Taskforce (GPACT) in the amount of \$2.15 million. In collaboration with state and county officials, GPACT will work to address traditional auto theft, chop shops, carjackings, synthetic identify fraud, fraudulent vehicle documents, rogue towing agencies, and insurance fraud.

In 2022, the city awarded grants totaling \$700,000 to five different organizations to undertake violence reductions strategies beginning this year. Very soon, we will award additional grants totaling \$1.5 million to organizations to undertake violence reductions strategies in 2023/2024.

There's more: The City of Peoria received \$3.1 in state funds to establish a Co-Response Unit within the Peoria Police Department. This unit will include victim services, cognitive and developmental services, as well as mental and/or behavioral health issues. The team will respond to mental health calls and assist victims after incidents. This unit is a partnership between the City, the Health Department, and Carle Health.

Our police are using technology, such as Shot-Spotter and License Plate Readers to more efficiently deploy our resources, and more quickly and effectively respond to incidents. The result is that we are getting chronic offenders off of our streets. Chief Echevarria isn't here today as he's taking a brief, but well-deserved vacation. Assistant Police Chief Brad Dixon joins us this evening. Thank you, Chief Dixon, and your team, for all of your efforts to keep us safe.

Also, in the area of public safety, we dedicated the city's newest Fire Station (#4), located at Western and Howett Streets, and named after Peoria's first African American firefighter, Edward B. Gaines, Jr.

Under the leadership of new Fire Chief Shawn Sollberger, the city was awarded a \$4 million dollar FEMA SAFER Grant that will pay the wages and benefits of 11 new Peoria firefighters for three years. Kudos to Chief Sollberger for this great achievement.

Peoria has a rich history of being an arts and entertainment hub.

The Peoria Civic Center is hosting big names and drawing big crowds. Their mission is to be a catalyst for improving the quality of life and economic vitality in our area by hosting diverse events that are enjoyed and supported by all segments of our community. This is why the city supported continued capital investments in the Civic Center by issuing \$20 million in bonds to complement \$25 million of capital funding provided by the State of Illinois. Together, these funds will support major renovations and help to ensure that professional hockey continues to play in Peoria.

Some local organizations support art. Some support our youth. Still others promote and empower women. Artists ReEnvisioning Tomorrow, better known as Art, Inc. – does all of these things, and more! **I'm so pleased to recognize Nikki and Jonathon Romain**, the principals of Art, Inc. It's hard to believe, but Art, Inc, will be celebrating its 5-year anniversary this year. Their growth has been inspiring – from just Jonathon and Nikki at the beginning, they now have 12 full-time staff and employ about 30 contractors. Their after-school program has grown from

35 children a year ago to well over 100 now. They run a popular arts and culture-themed summer school too!

Nikki's passion, the "She Said" program, has been amplifying women's voices for two years and has proven to be a great event. Jonathon is always busy creating art, maintaining that big building, and recently he started two programs, both modeled after his own personal experiences - helping artists become entrepreneurs and managing the business side themselves, and "Changing the Narrative," a project designed to help youth make better choices and avoid a life of criminal activity, incarceration, or premature death. Nikki and Jonathon – please stand. Thank you for choosing Peoria!

Conclusion

A lot has happened over this past year and the Peoria City Council has made many important decisions. I think the best decision we made, by far, was to abolish the **back-in-parking**. Hallelujah! (Pause)

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge that while Peoria is often cited in national publications as one of the most affordable and one of the 50, 60, or 70 best places to live in the country, we should strive to make Peoria the best place to live – **period!**

To that end, we have recently kicked off the creation of our 2023 Five-Year Strategic Plan: Creating our Roadmap for the Future. We had great community input at our kick-off meetings earlier this month and we want continued community input as this action plan develops over the next few months. Please follow us at Peoria2023.org and let **your** voice be a part of this endeavor.

Peoria's A-Pet-a-la **1** has been activated, the flowers are blooming, and we are well positioned for **growth and prosperity**.

Joshua and the Chamber team, thank you – I **thank** everyone for coming. With your help, Peoria will continue to grow and prosper. May God Bless Peoria!