

State of the City 2025

Thank you, Brad, for your kind introduction and support for this event. Welcome everyone – Business Leaders, Labor Leaders, Community Leaders, Public Servants, and our Partners – welcome to the 2025 State of the City: **Investing in Peoria's Future**. Many thanks to Homefield Energy, our Title Sponsor of today's event – thanks again Mr. Brad Watson.

The State of the City is hosted each year by the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce. Event proceeds help the Chamber to carry out its important operations and aligns with their goal to inform its business constituents. The Chamber's President and CEO, Jessica Linder Gallo, is a phenomenal and visionary leader – and I want to thank her and her team for putting this together once again.

Although we've held this event in some spectacular venues over the past four years, I am very happy that State of the City has returned as a luncheon event at our cherished Peoria Civic Center. This is a revitalized and upgraded facility that is producing extraordinary events and attracting record-breaking audiences from throughout Central Illinois and beyond. This past April, singer and songwriter Bob Dylan broke the record as the highest grossing music act at the Civic Center's Prairie Home Alliance Theater. Congratulations to General Manager Rik Edgar and his team for making it all happen.

I want to thank and recognize my colleagues on the Peoria City Council that have joined us today. Please stand and remain standing as I call your name: Our At-Large council members: Dr. Bernice Gordon Young, John Kelly, Zach Oyler, and Mike Vespa. Our District Council Members: Denise Jackson, Tim Riegenbach, Dr. Andre Allen, Denis Cyr, and our newest council member Alex Carmona. Please help me thank them for their dedicated service to the City of Peoria. It's not an easy job but we all love Peoria and want to make a positive difference for our city.

And lastly, I'd like to recognize City Manager Patrick Urich who works with our city council to implement policy decisions and leads a team of 710 city employees. Manager Urich has an amazing team of department heads, (all listed in the Annual Report) who work every day to make Peoria a better place to live, work, and play. Please stand, Mr. Manager and all City staff, for a well-**earned** round of applause.

My theme today is - Investing in Peoria's Future! Peoria has an amazing history and we must assure, through our investments today, that Peoria has an amazing future. Historically, the city has experienced very positive outcomes when we've invested in our priorities – like education, healthcare, business, and research.

We've also experienced very negative outcomes when we failed to invest in our infrastructure, our heritage neighborhoods, and our people. This has resulted in rocky roads, crumbling curbs and sidewalks, polluted water systems, and individuals lacking the skills needed for today's jobs.

I'm not here today just to talk about all the great things that have happened over the past year in Peoria. Yes, I want to highlight several of those things for sure; but I also want to call out some real problems that we have, to share some strategies for addressing them, and to secure your commitment to become actively engaged in the solutions. You see, the state of our city is not just in the hands of City Hall. It takes all of us, working together, to make Peoria the thriving community we all want to see.

But first let's talk finances.

The City continues to be in a strong financial position.

The 2025 city budget is \$275M. We have \$136M in reserves, including over \$49M in the General Fund. We continue to pay down our general obligation debt and, fortunately, we don't have the excessive financial shortfalls that many other cities are currently experiencing.

The 2025 budget has no increase in garbage or stormwater fees. It meets our annual obligation for public safety pensions and closes out \$47M in American Rescue Plan funds.

We've invested \$66M in our CIP - Capital Investment Plan - with a focus on our greatest needs: \$18M for streets and roads; \$33M for stormwater and sewer improvements and \$7.6M for vehicles, technology and cybersecurity.

To summarize: The City of Peoria continues to be in a strong financial position.

So, what should we invest in?

We are Investing in Public Safety!

I'm so proud of Peoria's public safety professionals.

Our Fire Department responded to 652 fires in 2024, and the over 24,000 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls – that's over 66 calls per day!

The old firehouse on Northmoor Road has been demolished, and construction is progressing on a new Station 16, which will feature modern infrastructure, updated technology and an energy efficient design. This is an investment in our firefighting facilities and operations.

And while other cities are struggling to recruit for public safety positions, the Peoria Fire Department received over 300 applications last year, their highest total in a decade. These great results were driven by a renewed recruitment committee, a fitness team that supported applicants through the strenuous physical agility tests, and an expanded apprenticeship program. Many thanks to Fire Chief Shawn Sollcaberger for his remarkable leadership and to all fire personnel who put their life on the line for us each and every day.

Our Police Department has made incredible progress in lowering gun crime in the city through their dual approach of technology aided enforcement and people focused community engagement. On average last year, officers were dispatched on over 340 calls per day.

This year in 2025, compared to this same time last year, shooting incidents are down 36% and shooting victims are down 41%. Shooting homicides, at 5, are the same as this time last year.

I want to point out two things: One, these are not random incidents, they are targeted incidents. Unfortunately, most of these are domestic situations that involve very young people having guns and using them resolve their conflicts. But as we know, it doesn't resolve or solve anything.

But what is being solved are the homicides occurring in Peoria. Last year, Peoria police solved 14, or 57% of the homicides committed. This year they have solved and closed 100% of the homicides committed to date. 100 percent.

The investments we've made in License Plate Readers (known as LPRs) and the FUCES camera system are paying off. A crime happens, police get a hit on an LPR, they check the FUCES camera system and bam – they identify the perpetrators and make arrests.

Through their walk and talks, Safe Zone Block Parties, and more than 30 annual community engagement events, they are building trust and strengthening community relationships.

Solving crimes at this level will help to reduce crime in our foreseeable future because we send the message that if you do the crime in Peoria, you're going to do some time in a place that you don't want to be.

Last year, the Peoria Police Department held 54 recruiting events across seven states, resulting in 39 new hires. New hires include seven African-Americans, five Hispanic and 27 Caucasian officers. Five recruits were women. And while police departments across the nation are struggling to get applicants, ours applicant pools are growing. It's called intentionality and immense effort.

I commend the work of Chief Eric Echevarria and his team of heroes for protecting our city and its people.

What should we invest in?

We are Investing in Our Neighborhoods!

I'm pleased to announce that the City has launched a new initiative called *Peoria Connects*—a city-led effort to support the businesses, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations that are making a difference in our community. Through this campaign, we're helping local partners tap into resources like dedicated ARPA funds to help bring their ideas to life.

That includes projects like building community gardens, installing neighborhood signage, and supporting commercial renovation grants that help local businesses make much-needed improvements. *Peoria Connects* is about investing in the people and places that move Peoria forward. More information can be found on the city website or you can reach out to Ms. Stacy Peterson, our Strategic Communications Manager, who is leading this effort.

We recently awarded over 49 Neighborhood Mini-Grants, amounting to over \$200,000 to neighborhood and homeowner associations to support their improvement projects.

Our Alley and Porch Light Program provided half a million dollars in no-cost security lighting for homes in targeted areas. And our Exterior Home Improvement program supported 51

homeowners with new roofs, siding, fences, driveways and other repairs to enhance safety and curb appeal.

I can't fully express the value that Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) has brought to our city. These grants provided \$269,000 to assist nine non-profits that provided support services to over 1700 low-income residents. Services included a 24/7 crisis nursery, youth mental health education, employment readiness and retention programs, and health education. But CDBG is on the federal chopping block and I urge you to contact our federal legislators to urge them to save this program.

Our Peoria Land Bank used over \$2.4 million to demolish 194 unsafe and blighted properties to help stabilize our older neighborhoods. I want to recognize our Director of Community Development, Joe Dulin, and his amazing team for their outstanding work in bringing new resources and new opportunities to the city. Thank you – we appreciate you all. Truly.

What should we invest in?

We are Investing in our Businesses!

We've worked very hard this past year to grow our businesses and our economic base. The City's Office of Economic Development, led by Assistant City Manager Kimberly Richardson, has driven over \$125M in investments.

Downtown is the heart of our city. One of the real highlights of 2024 was the grand opening of Distillery Labs. It has a modern, big city look and feel and it offers truly unique support services for entrepreneurs and start-ups businesses. Shout out to Doug Cruitt for effectively leading that organization.

Peoria is truly a regional Center of Innovation – and in that spirit, the City supported eleven local start-ups with a total of \$245,000 in dedicated technology grant funding.

The Warehouse District is our Renaissance success story – it has a vibrant energy that we want to replicate in other areas. Mixed use development – commercial, retail, and residential is the future and the PNC Bank building will be our opportunity to prove it. First, let me say thank you to PNC Bank, and its President Brian Ray, for deciding to stay in downtown Peoria. This bank complex is ideal for both residential and commercial usage – supporting the high demand for all ages who want to live in downtown Peoria. The City purchased this property last year and we expect to have bids from developers in less than three weeks from today.

The Peoria Riverfront Museum, led by one of Peoria's greatest cheerleaders, John Morris, is drawing record crowds by featuring nationally known exhibits and a wide array of interesting subjects. And folks, this is good for business! Thank you John for putting the City of Gratitude on a national scale.

Business and economic development is occurring in every city council district:

In District 1, represented by Councilwoman Denise Jackson, a long-awaited southside grocery store - CJ Market – is slated to open in September. Numerous new housing developments will help to populate that area to support and to help sustain that business.

In District 2, represented by Councilman Alex Carmona, we will see a new Dutch Brothers Coffee shop constructed at University and War Memorial. District 2 also covers downtown where Caterpillar – a 100 year-old company with more than 12,000 employees in our area – is investing about \$30M in downtown facility renovations and adding almost 400 engineers from outside of this region. That's very encouraging. Happy Anniversary Big Yellow!

In District 3, represented by Councilman Tim Riggerbach, we will see Jonah's 101 Oyster Bar come to Keller Station this year. Sheridan Village has a new owner who is adding new businesses like Jersey Mikes. And the Wisconsin Street overhaul is making way for new business and economic opportunities from Glen Oak Avenue to War Memorial Drive.

In District 4, represented by Councilman Andre Allen, Tilted-10 joined Northwoods Mall, the new Aqua Tots, Brienzo's Pizza & Bar, and Dive-In Arcade all opened on Orange Prairie Road, Egg Republic opened its doors, and construction is taking place for the new Raising Cane's restaurant.

In District 5, represented by Councilman Denis Cyr, economic development has included the upcoming Grey Oak subdivision of 115 new homes and the formation of two new TIF districts to expand existing businesses.

You see, business is happening in Peoria. We lose some here and there, but we gain many more than we lose. Thank you to our At-Large council members for supporting all of these city-wide business endeavors.

I said that I wouldn't talk about only good things today. So I'll be straight with you all. We have been hearing from our business and development partners that the city's permit processes are problematic. That they are too time-consuming, restrictive, and redundant. We've heard this repeatedly despite the adjustments that have occurred. Well, it's time that we reexamine, with your input, and streamline permit approvals.

Some cities are now using AI technologies to reduce redundancies in the permitting process. One Illinois city cut their 18-step process down to 6 steps. I believe that we can also speed up our processes and cut red tape while continuing to maintain safety and quality. New and expanded development in Peoria requires this.

I assure you that, over the next few months, we will carefully examine our permitting process, and with your input, make adjustments for necessary improvements.

What should we invest in?

We are investing in our Workforce!

This is one that is near and dear to my heart because education and workforce development was my career for more than 40 years.

It is essential to our growth and prosperity as a city that we invest in the education and work skills of our people. We must prepare them for the 2,000 job openings we have in healthcare. For the high demand for workers in transportation, construction, retail, hospitality, education, and (yes) manufacturing.

We can do this only with our partners in this field – our education institutions, our employers, and the training programs provided by our construction trade partners like West Central Building Trades that provide good paying union jobs.

Thank you Peoria Public Schools, Regional Office of Education, Dunlap and Limestone Schools, ICC, Bradley, and Eureka College. Thank you Carle Health and Methodist College, OSF Healthcare and Saint Francis Medical Center College of Nursing. Thank you West Central Building Trades. Thank you Peoria Riverfront Museum for your education services. To all of all of our education and training providers in the region: please stand.

Thank you all for investing in our people, for changing their lives, and giving them the opportunity to be their best selves.

This year, for the first time, students from Peoria Public Schools competed in the National Speech & Debate Association’s Middle School National Tournament, one of the most prestigious and competitive academic events in the country. Six PPS students travelled to California with their coaches from Advantage Communication.

They all did well but this young man, Marvin Polnitz, a 5th grader at Trewyn Middle School, was selected the National Champion in Humorous Interpretation. Marvin is a great example of what happens when we invest in our young people.

Congratulations to Dr. Sharon Kherat and the PPS Board for providing this unique opportunity to students in our community.

This is why we started the Mayors Youth Employment Program and the Mayor’s Summer Youth Internship Project.

One day the youth in our schools will be the adults in our workplaces.

What should we invest in?

We are Investing in Our Infrastructure!

During 2024, the city dedicated \$75 million in road projects that are being completed over the next few years. In 2025, the city is continuing that investment and now the total value of road projects being worked on is up to \$88 million. I won’t recite these because you can find them in our Annual Report. But please know that the City understands the importance of investing in our roads, sidewalks, curbs, bridges, sewers, and our rail systems. Yes, we continue to make progress in our efforts to bring passenger rail service to the city of Peoria. Thanks to Secretary Ray LaHood, Rep. Ryan Spain, and all of our partners in this endeavor.

Infrastructure also includes other modes of transportation like the General Wayne A. Downing Peoria International Airport. The airport authority recently added a new United

Airlines flight to and from Denver, Colorado. PIA is connecting us both domestically and throughout the world.

I commend airport general manager Gene Olson and his team for setting high standards in airline travel and accommodations. He and Karen Jensen gave me a tour of our airport and its operations last year. It is so very impressive and now features a beautiful, well-stocked Junction Cafe and Bar. PIA is a great place to fly to and from. Welcome to Peoria! We are a destination to enjoy!

What should we invest in?

With a special focus today, We are Investing in Our Housing!

Peoria, like many cities across the nation, is facing a serious housing crisis. We are experiencing a historically low inventory of available housing in all price ranges. The deficit has resulted from a lack of investment, **over decades**, in quality, affordable housing. Without swift action, our housing shortage will grow exponentially over the next five years. In my opinion, it should be our top priority in conjunction with community safety.

To further our efforts, we will have a Harvard Bloomberg City Hall Fellow, Jacob Xavier, join us for two years, starting in August to help us develop housing solutions. Jacob's salary, health benefits, and housing stipend will be provided by the Bloomberg organization and we are very blessed to be selected for this opportunity. When Jacob visited Peoria last month to find a place to stay, he chose an apartment in downtown Peoria, a very popular area to live, work, and play.

Peoria is also a great place to learn, which is why I believe that our upcoming purchase of Expo Gardens for housing development will not only generate new revenues to the Peoria school district, the city and other taxing bodies, but will attract families to this area serviced by Richwoods and Northmoor Schools. I couldn't be more excited about this rare opportunity. Many thanks to Leader Dave Koehler and Leader Jehan Gordon-Booth for lending their support for this Land Bank funding.

I will now yield the rest of my time to five developers who are making a difference through their **housing** projects and investments in Peoria. In about three minutes each, they will share their exciting stories.

<Builder Testimonials>

Thank you to each of these individuals and their organizations for **investing in Peoria's future**. They've given us hope and inspiration and responded to our urgent demand for more housing.

Everyone here can get involved in this effort in some way moving forward. Let's build a city that works for everyone. Let's make investments that will **last** long after we have gone.

Lastly, I want to thank you for allowing me to serve as Peoria's mayor. I promise to give you my 100% best now and into the future. Thank you so very much!