

State of the City 2025 Speech Transcript

March 24, 2025

Introduction

Thank you, Bart, that was a lovely introduction.

Good evening, and welcome. I always look forward to seeing so many of you at this event, and I want to extend a welcome to those who are watching online.

Thank you for choosing to spend your evening with us.

I want to start by recognizing my colleagues on the Vancouver City Council who are here with us tonight. Councilors Bart Hansen, Diana Perez, and Kim Harless.

I also want to recognize Mayor Pro Tem Eric Paulsen and Councilors Ty Stober and Sarah Fox, who could not be with us tonight.

I am grateful for the commitment, caring, and experience my fellow council members bring.



As we gather tonight, I am reminded of our work together in 2024 and the exciting opportunities ahead for our community in 2025 and beyond.

Last year was marked by significant changes and transitions.

At the City, we hired a new City Manager, Lon Pluckhahn and Police Chief, Troy Price.

We balanced a difficult budget,navigated challenges,and embraced new opportunities. Through it all, we built on what came before and laid the groundwork for our future success.

However, we share this journey and this work.

it is a collective effort between the community and the city.

We don't take this input for granted or lightly; we can't do our work without you.

Your input, ideas, expertise, and, yes, even your critiques are vital to our work.

You have told us what is important to you.



Through emails, phone calls, social media, testimony at Council meetings and public hearings, community forums, surveys, serving on committees, commissions, and boards, and countless conversations over coffee and everywhere in between.

We received over 6,000 responses to project surveys and met with many residents at our Council Community Forums and other meetings.

We also conducted over 40 engagement projects on various issues, including Complete Streets to Parks planning, the Comprehensive Plan, economic development, ...climate change, homelessness, parking, and more.

When reflecting on all these connections and points of contact, one consistent theme stands out for 2024:

your unwavering hope for the things that foster our community's quality of life andyour desire for local government to problem-solve,collaborate, andadvance the priorities that directly contribute to Vancouver's livability.

In the past year, we have continued to prioritize and invest in the issues you identified as critical.

Community priorities have remained consistent over the last few years. These issues will always rise to the top of our priority list ...as they don't lend themselves to easy or overnight solutions.

Homelessness,community safety,affordable housing, and the local economyare an intricate interweaving of relationships and connections,funding mechanisms, andcommunity needs and interests,..... requiring thoughtful anddeliberate solutions and collaboration to ensure lasting progress.

Over the last year, ...with the council's leadership, ...the expertise of city staff, andthe community's considerable involvement and input,we made progress toward our shared priorities.

Let's talk about community safety

I know there is uncertainty and even fear in our community right now.

We've been meeting with community partners to discuss how we can collaborate on supporting community safety and belonging.

We want everyone in Vancouver to feel safe, ...supported, and welcome in our community.



We have received calls and emails about what the city will do when faced with decisions and policies being made at the Federal level, particularly around immigration-related executive orders.

It has been part of our policies for the last eight years, and I want to say it today for the community to hear.

The Vancouver Police Department will not undertake immigration-related investigations or sweeps and ...will not ask about immigration status.

Officers will not contact, detain, or arrest an individual solely for a suspected violation of immigration laws.

Despite what happens outside of Vancouver, we will continue to serve all community members with dignity,empathy, and compassion..... regardless of their status.

In our ongoing efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone in our community, last year, we asked the voters to pass ...Proposition 4, a levy to help fund police services.



While the levy failed by a slim margin, community safety remains a priority, and the challenges facing how we provide police services remain.

Vancouver is still the second lowest staffed police department among Washington cities with 100,000 or more people.

The demand for police services continues to grow as our population grows.

Calls for service continue to be increasingly complex, requiring multiple officers for extended time and diverting police services from other parts of the city.

In addition to speaking with your votes, ...you gave us a lot of feedback about the proposition's complexity, cost, and what you would be willing to support.

You also told us you wanted to see more coordination with our partners in our local justice system.

We heard from you. Since the election, the City has been meeting with our partners to discuss regional law enforcement and court needs.

We are also reconvening the City Manager’s Police Advisory Committee. This group of residents was crucial to developing Prop 4, and we’ll ask them to help us determine what a potential new measure could entail.

Regardless of funding, the Vancouver Police Department's officers and staff will continue to work with our community to preserve life, protect property, and enhance livability.

As we consider future measures to fund public safety services, we remain dedicated to the promise of previous voter-approved measures like Proposition 2 for Fire and Emergency Services.

Over the past few years, Prop 2 has enabled the hiring of 40 additional staff.

New additions include Truck 10 on the east side and the squad program at Stations 1, 2, and 6. These enhancements have more effectively distributed the call load, allowing engine companies to focus on higher-priority and critical calls.

So far, early 2025 data shows that response times in these areas have decreased by 5% from last year. Systemwide, our combined



city and county area response times have improved by 6% over 2024.

We are designing a retrofit for Station 8 and planning to replace Stations 3 and 6. While no physical work has started on these projects, they represent significant future improvements.

While the community has invested in Fire and Emergency services through Proposition 2 and..... considerable volunteer hours, we rely on grants.

Over the last few years, Fire has received \$5 million in grants. These grants, particularly those from FEMA, are critical in purchasing equipment... training emergency personneland protecting the public with our congoing success in community education.

Community safety comes in many forms. It isn't just Police and Fire services;those are essential,but there are other components to a safe community.

Well-maintained roads, ensuring the safety of pedestrians and cyclists,planning for our future development,resiliency in the face of climate change, and more.



Clean, safe drinking water is critical to our community's health and well-being.

Last year, we received \$25 million for water safety improvements, which are largely focused on PFAS mitigation.

The City has remained committed to addressing PFAS in the water supply and implementing long-term elimination measures.

We have proactively tested and reported levels since 2020. In 2023, we began a quarterly testing and reporting program.

We are investing in filtration systems that use granular activated carbon to remove PFAS from our drinking water. This is one of the most studied and effective methods of removing PFAS.

Water Station 14 has consistently had the highest sampling rate of all water stations. Treatment for this water station has been identified as a priority, and we anticipate starting construction on this new filter treatment system this summer.

Our efforts are on track to meet the EPA implementation deadline of 2029 for PFAS treatment solutions.



As we focus on our community's safety and quality of life, we must also remember that this extends to the unhoused members of our community.

Homelessness

The City Council's emergency declaration on homelessness reached its one-year mark in 2024.

You continue to tell us that this issue is important to you.

You have come to Council,written to us,attended community forums, and,in our most recent community survey, told us that the “most important issue to youone that you want your local government to do something about is homelessness.

We have heard you, and at the same time, addressing homelessness and its impact on both the housed and the unhoused is complex; no one solution exists.

Addressing homelessness isn't a one-time effort but a sustained and evolving commitment.

An interconnected set of policies,strategies,... partnerships, and programs is required to drive outcomes now and in the long term.



Just because something is hard doesn't mean we can't make progress.

When we originally created our first Safe Stay Community back in 2021, it was intended to pilot a supportive space for people experiencing homelessness.

Because of the program's effectiveness, the City Council ratified extensions of the duration of Safe Stay Community sites 1 and 2 in 2024. This will allow us to continue helping more individuals take the important steps from unhoused into hopefully permanent homes without waiting outdoors for so long.

In 2024, 112 people graduated into housing from a Safe Stay or Safe Park. Our 4 Safe Stays have served 424 individuals over the last 3 years.

But despite this progress, there are still not enough shelter beds to house the more than 500 residents who remain unsheltered.

This impacts the housed and the unhoused, and the consequences can be deadly for the unhoused. In 2024, 54 unhoused individuals died in our community.



That is unacceptable; we need to have the capacity to get people inside.

One way we did this in 2024 was to expand Winter Shelter capacity by using City buildings to provide safe and warm shelter for those who needed it.

Over the winter months, we sheltered more than 175 individuals in City buildings.

The Winter Shelter also helped families stay together in the evening. In many cases, the availability of these shelters was the only reason some families with children could remain together each night over the winter.

The Winter Shelters were at capacity all season and to state the obvious, we need more shelter.

In 2025, the City will continue working on a Bridge Shelter. This type of facility is critical in helping fill the gap in our local social safety net.

This service-rich space will bridge the gap between homelessness and housing with added shelter capacity and wraparound care.



With a Bridge Shelter, we can help more people move through the continuum of care to stable and permanent housing.

Last year, we made significant progress toward making a Bridge Shelter a reality.

We have an experienced operator, ...Do Good. They're on board to help us work on the shelter's design and scope.

We acquired property and spent time with the surrounding neighbors and businesses to understand their needs, and we'll continue to meet with them to ensure the shelter is an asset to the area, just as our Safe Stays have been.

At the core of our response to homelessness is our HART team, Homeless Assistance and Resources Team, ...which got a much-needed expansion with a generous donation of \$1.9 million from the Community Foundation's Ed and Dollie Lynch Fund. This donation increased the size of the team directly working on this issue and funded up to eight outreach workers for two years.



In 2024, HART worked with VPD and Public Works and conducted 48 camp clean-ups, and removed more than 400 tons of solid waste from public property.

Also, in 2024, HART trained our Police Department on effective ways to respond to situations involving the unhoused and citing them into community court

We understand that not all residents have agreed with the City's approach to homelessness. Nonetheless, we are dedicated to finding long-term solutions that consider the needs and concerns of both the housed and unhoused residents of Vancouver.

Let's talk about Housing

Tied to the homelessness crisis is the need for affordable housing. The lack of affordable housing not only exacerbates moving from homelessness to housing but also creates instability and insecurity as many individuals and families find themselves cost-burdened and grappling with making ends meet.

By staying focused on the affordable housing shortage, we can make significant strides toward alleviating one of the root causes of homelessness and providing a pathway to more equitable, ...reliable, and ...sustainable housing for all community members.



While Vancouver has focused on increasing housing production and affordability for many years, we're still falling short of our goal of creating the 2,500 housing units per year that are needed over the next 10 years.

We are making progress through our Housing Action Plan and the voter-approved Proposition 3, which supports the Affordable Housing Fund.

Through the Affordable Housing Fund, in 2024, there were:

- More than 1,500 units rented
- 121 households received rental assistance
- 38 shelter beds supported

In 2024, the AHF started a new program to support homebuyers. \$1million was awarded to support 20 homeownership opportunities for people with low to moderate incomes and supported our first homebuyers.

We saw almost \$5 million of investments in affordable housing projects come to fruition: Lincoln Place 2, the O Street Tiny Homes, and Laurel Manor.



They will meet the specific needs of vulnerable populations, such as those exiting homelessness,people with health challenges, people in recovery, andseniors.

We also learned that three new projects received \$1.32 million in grant awards from the Department of Commerce from the Connecting Housing to Infrastructure Program.

In 2024, we received 13 awards that will provide more than \$30 million for housing infrastructure development and energy efficiency improvements, including \$21.5 million for The Heights District and the development of the Grand Loop.

Where We're Going

You may have noticed that I have mentioned several grants tonight. Vancouver takes pride in bringing your tax dollars back from the state and federal levelto the communityto address and work on your priorities.

Just in 2024, the City landed 58 new grants worth \$88 million, leading to a record high of 197 grants worth more than \$218 million being managed by the City.

We have received questions about future grants and federal funding for City projects and programs. I want to offer a little



perspective on the ambiguity around federal funding and grants we rely on.

Administrations come and go, and many of the grants and funding we pursue have always spanned multiple administrations and the ensuing shift in priorities that accompany them.

We will continue to work on ...ambitious projects that support the community and Vancouver's growth and development.

That is not going to stop.

Neither is our work to advocate with our legislative delegation to ensure that Vancouver's interests, ...needs, and ...priorities are met.

Economic Prosperity - Vancouver's future depends on a thriving economy!

Everyone in this room knows Vancouver has a lot to offer with destination areas like our waterfront and downtown, the diversity of the Fourth Plain Corridor, new mixed-use commercial and residential neighborhoods such as the ones under development around the Vancouver Innovation Center, Waterfront Gateway, or The Heights.



We also have Clark College and WSU Vancouver which offer opportunities forlife-long learning andjob training.

All of this, combined with our favorable tax and business climate, growing talent base, and high quality of life, makes us an attractive place for businesses and those who live here.

Because of these advantages, our city is experiencing significant growth. We have cemented our place as southwest Washington's economic engine, and we can't take that for granted.

To stay competitive, we must be intentional about economic development and ensure opportunity for all residents, which is a priority of the community and the City.

Last year, we started developing the city's first economic development strategy.

We gathered leaders representing diverse communities and business sectors to form the Community Leaders Steering Committee.

They helped shape the long-term economic vision, ...initiatives, andinvestments that include pathways to quality jobs, reducing barriers, strengthening support for small businesses, investing in neighborhood commercial districts, and positioning Vancouver as an inclusive center of innovation and entrepreneurship

Our commitment to economic prosperity for all is more than words —it's becoming a reality.

Our efforts to foster a thriving local economy are already in motion, with numerous impactful projects underway.

Let's take a closer look at some of the projects that are contributing to the local economy now and will continue to contribute to our vitality well into the future.

Video played: <https://youtu.be/mICUn91iX0E>

New City Flag



There is so much to be proud of and many reasons to be hopeful about our City's future.

As we continue to build on our successes, it's important to recognize the unique aspects of our community that bring us together.

Let's take a moment to hear from some of our fellow residents about one of the unique, but perhaps misunderstood, pieces of our City's identity.

Video played: <https://youtu.be/EZl4JpKpmU8>

The community and City have undergone tremendous change and growth since the flag was adopted 32 years ago.

If our flag symbolizes our community, it should represent our shared values, ...aspirations, and... pride for what makes Vancouver special.

It should also follow best practices for meaningful and effective flag design.

Like all the projects we work on, it is better with your participation.



We are opening a design competition to create the City's next flag.

We invite you to reflect on Vancouver's future and consider what symbolizes and represents our community.

In a time of uncertainty, rallying together around what unites us is so important.

You can learn more about the design competition and how to enter on the city's website.

As I said, Vancouver has so much to be proud of. Another point of pride is having a national historic site in the city's core. I mention this because Fort Vancouver is commemorating 200 years since its founding in 1825.

Of course, this allowed Vancouver to be founded,develop and eventually grow into the community we know today.

To recognize this bicentennial and to honor the founding of the Fort, and Vancouver, as well as the Indigenous people who established the first communities, we have partnered with



Visit Vancouver,
the Greater Vancouver Chamber,
the National Parks Service, and
Friends of Fort Vancouver
to create a Community Event Pass to encourage both residents
and visitors to explore and learn about Vancouver.

There are prizes, so download the pass at the Visit Vancouver
website and start exploring the Fort and all that Vancouver has to
offer.

Close

You trust us to make decisions, ...set policy, andsteward tax
dollars. But we don't do this alone.

Everything we work on is driven by the priorities you have
identified, focusing on the issues where you seek progress,
innovation, answers, or solutions.

When you use your voice, we listen. We may not always agree on
how to get there, but doing what is best for the community is our
north star.

There's so much to take pride in, now and into the future.



The state of our City is strong, and it gets stronger every time you testify before the City Council,attend a public meeting,write us an email,pick up the phone, ...mail us a letter....or volunteer.

Together, we are shaping a vibrant and resilient Vancouver where every voice matters and counts, regardless of the uncertainty around us.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment and support.

Let's continue to work together to build a brighter future for all of Vancouver.