



Luke A. Bronin
Mayor

2023 State of the City Address

As Prepared for Delivery

Introduction

Council President, members of the City Council, Madam Treasurer, members of the General Assembly, colleagues across city government, Sara and my family, and residents of our great city, good evening.

Our City Council President cannot be with us tonight because of a death in her family, and, on behalf of our city, I want to express my prayers and condolences to her and her loved ones.

I also want to start by thanking my family — my wife Sara is here, as is my mom. And I want to thank our team. My right hand, Thea Montanez, and every member of our team, who love this city and work for this city day and night. I'm so grateful to every single one of you.

Tonight, I want to start where I usually end: the state of our city is strong. Its strength doesn't come from the budget I'm going to talk about, or from this building. It doesn't come from me as Mayor or from any other elected leaders.

Hartford is strong because the people of Hartford are strong.

The people of Hartford are courageous, resilient, creative, passionate and compassionate. The people of Hartford get knocked down, get back up, and then reach out to help others do the same. That's true strength.

Over the past eight years, it has been a deep honor to wake up every morning with the chance to try and do good for this city. I've had the privilege to work alongside many of you. Together, we've tried to do what's right, not what's easy.

Our first challenge was a fiscal crisis bigger than any other in our history.

We confronted that crisis honestly. We made tough cuts. We built partnerships with our unions, our companies, and the state. And then we did the hard work of rebuilding.

Since 2016, we have not taken on a single dollar of debt. We've produced surpluses every year, we've built up reserves, we've rebuilt schools and invested in infrastructure.

Last year, we cut the property tax rate for the first time in years — and by the largest amount in decades.

If you'd told me eight years ago that that's where we'd be today, I'm not sure I would have believed it. But it wasn't an accident. We did it together.

The proposed budget

The budget I submitted today builds on that progress. It is balanced and responsible. It protects the ground we've gained, and it makes important new investments in our community.

Like all of our recent budgets, this budget does not include any new borrowing or any one-time revenues. It funds the pension contribution. It doesn't delay any obligations.

It adds new tax relief for seniors by expanding the senior property tax credit. Not long ago, the senior property tax credit was \$500. Under this budget, it will be \$1,000. That's real relief to our seniors.

This budget builds in the costs of the collective bargaining agreements we have reached with our police officers and other unions, so we can recruit and retain the teams we need.

When we battled the budget crisis in 2016, we made deep, painful cuts. Over the past few years, we've been healing those cuts, carefully and thoughtfully.

This budget includes new positions in our Department of Public Works, so that our team can better care for our facilities, our parks, and our streets. It includes additional positions for our housing inspection team and our fire prevention team. It includes new resources for our 911 call center, for our IT team and cyber security, and more.

It also includes a significant increase for our recreation department and our libraries. We want to dramatically expand hours and programming at our rec centers and at our libraries, too. Our kids and our families deserve it.

Every budget involves negotiation. But this budget reflects the priorities and aspirations that I have heard both from our community and from our City Council, and I urge the Council to support it.

The work that's underway

Beyond our city budget, we've gone after every dollar and every opportunity we could to accelerate our recovery from the profound disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We rarely step back and survey the full sweep of the work that our team is doing every day, and I want to take some time today to do that. Because this team is doing a lot.

To help our kids recover and reconnect, we've awarded millions of dollars in grants for one hundred organizations serving nearly twenty thousand young people. We invested in a citywide youth sports collaborative. We've helped our Boys & Girls Clubs open a new location in the South End and reopen the club in the northwest. And we've expanded the Hartford Youth Service Corps, which is now a statewide and national model for youth employment.

To help make our city safer, we've strengthened longstanding community partnerships and built new ones. We've established a city-wide Hospital Based Violence Intervention initiative. We're building intensive, individualized intervention programs both for the young people and the adults who are involved violence. And we're working with Capital Community College to train members of our community who've been justice involved, and have made a change, to help others make that change, too.

We've expanded the Re-entry Welcome Center. We brought ROCA to Hartford, to work with the young women and mothers so often affected by violence and so often left out of the work to prevent it. We built the Hartford Emergency Assistance Response Team — HEARTeam — to respond when people are in crisis stemming from addiction, homelessness or mental illness, the first civilian response team in the state of Connecticut.

And we're advocating for the changes that Connecticut needs to make, so that when our police do the difficult and dangerous work of bringing to justice someone who has repeatedly hurt others in our community, that person doesn't come right back out and do it again.

Because quality, accessible housing is a basic need, we've invested in our housing inspection team. We're implementing our ambitious residential licensing program. We've partnered with Greater Hartford Legal Aid to represent tenants. We've put funds aside so the city can step in directly when landlords fall egregiously short. We're supporting Journey Home and the partners in our Coordinated Access Network in their unprecedented efforts to combat homelessness. We're dedicating opioid settlement funds to support those struggling with both addiction and homelessness. And we're helping our shelters, like McKinney, reinvent the way that shelters work.

Because homeownership makes for stable, healthier neighborhoods, we launched a new program to help seniors fix up the homes they own — and another to support city employees who buy a home in Hartford. We've partnered with SINA, NINA, and Habitat to rebuild vacant lots and historic homes. With the Hartford Land Bank, we created a whole new model for moving blighted properties from neglect to renewal. We worked with the Housing Authority to secure Community Investment Fund dollars to help transform Mary Shepard Place into a new community, with homeownership at its heart.

With our Love Hartford and Love Your Block campaigns, we're working for a greener, cleaner Hartford — with residents in the lead. We created the Neighborhood Ambassador program, changing lives with a second chance while helping to keep our avenues cleaner. We're building a riverfront trail to connect with the trails in Windsor. We're investing \$10 million in our parks, from Forster Park to Pope, Colt, Bushnell and Keney.

We've put arts at the heart of our recovery. From new summer festivals to murals to street stages, we're partnering with the Arts Council to support artists and creators and to celebrate the rich culture of our community. With DominGO open street Sundays to HartfordLive, we're bringing people together around new Hartford traditions.

With facade grants and our small business incentive grants, we're helping local entrepreneurs invest in their businesses. Because of our HartLift program, more than sixty businesses are opening up in vacant storefronts, and nearly seventy percent of those businesses are owned by women or entrepreneurs of color.

That kind of economic development will grow our grand list and grow jobs. It also complements the huge list of projects we have going on across Hartford. I won't be around for most of these ribbon cuttings, but these are the projects that will change the way our city looks and feels in the years ahead.

Along the full length of Albany Avenue, we're doubling down. From Westbrook Village to the historic Northwest Jones school, to Woodland & Albany, to the old police substation at Albany and Magnolia, to the renovation of historic buildings at Woodland and at Vine, to the redevelopment of the burned-out buildings across from Quirk, down to the historic Arrowhead Cafe, we're working to close the gaps, remove the blight, preserve the history, and build the future of Albany Avenue.

On Barbour Street, we're committed to building a new library branch where Snyder's grocery used to be, partnering to build housing on the vacant lots at Barbour and Westland, and working with the Barbour Street Renaissance team to lay the groundwork for more. On North Main, we're supporting the conversion of the Fuller Brush building — the old "welfare building" — into housing as well.

Fueling the growth in Parkville, we're partnering to build hundreds of new apartment units, redeveloping the historic Whitney Manufacturing building and building from the ground up on the surface parking lots down Bartholomew Avenue — key pieces of our broader Parkville plan.

On Washington Street, we're converting the historic state trade school to housing and we're working with Connecticut Children's to solidify Hartford's place as the premier location for child healthcare, while also helping to activate the neighborhood with retail.

We're partnering with CRDA on the development of Bushnell South, a transformative development that will link Main Street to the Capitol, Park Street to Bushnell Park, and replace a sea of surface parking.

In downtown, we're continuing to bring long-vacant buildings back to life, from 525 Main to the historic Pearl Street Firehouse to 200 Constitution Plaza. And on Pratt Street, every single storefront is under construction or under contract.

And we're also doing the planning so this kind of work can continue in the years ahead. From the Arrowhead Gateway, to the HartLine, to Riverlink, to the Homestead Avenue corridor, to the

thirty-three acre brownfield off Flatbush, to the South Meadows, to Coventry and Vine, we're laying out a roadmap for the next dozen years.

That's not everything we're doing, or even close. And the nature of our work is that it's never done, and it's never enough. And, of course, so much of the work that we're doing is possible because of the leadership and partnership of our federal delegation in Congress, our state legislators working with us hand in hand, our companies staying committed to the work, and the generous support of foundations and others who see the value and power of the work we do.

But when you step back and take a look at everything we're doing, I challenge you to show me a city in Connecticut or anywhere else that's doing more.

The work doesn't stop when we hold a press conference about a new program or partnership — that's when it starts. That's when our team begins the hard work of putting ideas into action and trying to make promises real. And we've got a team that's determined to do it right.

In the months ahead, we will push that work forward as fast and as far as we can. But much of it will fall to the next Mayor, the next council, the next team. We're planting the seeds. It will be up to others to help them grow. But with continued care and cultivation, those seeds will take root, grow, and blossom.

And it's my deepest hope that someday, I'll be able to walk my kids around Hartford and show them all that grew because of the seeds we planted together.

Conclusion

Whoever stands at this podium next year will have lots to do. The progress we've made is real, but fragile. And our city faces plenty of challenges, some of them tougher than ever since the pandemic turned the world upside down.

But I've never been more confident about Hartford's future, so long as we stay disciplined, make hard choices, confront threats honestly and transparently and with courage, and are bold enough stay the course we've set these last eight years.

And so long as the next mayor has a team who cares as much and gives as much as this team I get to work with every day.

People sometimes ask me what they can do for this city. To those outside Hartford, the answer is simple — think of Hartford as your city, too. Come here to live, come to a Yard Goats game, come for dinner, come for a show, spread the word. Make Hartford yours, in whatever way you want.

And my answer to the people of Hartford is also simple: first, be part of the work of building our city up, any way you can. As I said in my inaugural address in 2016, "Whether you put some new paint on your house, plant a new garden, mentor a neighbor, form a block watch, join your NRZ

— in whatever way feels right to you, join us and put your shoulder to the wheel. This is your city, and your city needs you.”

Second, as you do that work, also help to build and to be One Hartford.

We are one of the most diverse cities in the country. That is a huge part of our strength. We’re a city of neighborhoods — each with its own distinct character and culture. That, too, is a huge part of our strength.

But in almost any large American city, all of Hartford would be one neighborhood. Let’s act like that, in ways big and small. Vote for leaders who want to move the whole city forward, not just a part. Root for success no matter where it happens.

If you live in the northeast, take a Sunday afternoon and go get some pasteles in Parkville. If you live Behind the Rocks, come to the finale of Baby Grand Jazz at the Artists Collective. If you live in the West End, go watch a cricket match in Keney Park. If you live downtown, go check out a Los Amigos game in Colt Park. If you live in Coltsville, head over to the Parkville Market. Make this whole city yours, because it is yours.

Recognize that we can’t afford the old division between neighborhoods and downtown, South End and North End, because we’re tied together.

Every single part of this city is full of extraordinary people. Kids as talented as any kids anywhere. Moms and dads as dedicated as any parents anywhere. Neighbors as caring to neighbors as any neighbors anywhere. Artists, musicians, dancers, athletes as gifted as any others anywhere. A city where you can do anything you want to do — including help shape the future of the city, if you love it.

Hartford became my city because Sara and I fell in love with it. And it’s been the honor of a lifetime to serve all of you as mayor. I will miss this job because I believe so deeply in Hartford’s future, and I’ll miss the work of building a place of opportunity for everyone who calls our city home.

But I’ve never been more optimistic about our future. And in the meantime, we’ve still got lots of work to do.

God bless you all, and God bless the City of Hartford.