



Mayor Ed Gainey's 2025 State of the City Address

As Prepared for Delivery to Pittsburgh City Council
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Good morning.

Council President Lavelle, Council President Pro Tempore Wilson, Finance Chair Strassburger, members of City Council, and my fellow Pittsburghers: thank you for joining me here today to discuss the state of our beloved city.

When I first stood in this chamber four years ago, Pittsburgh faced a choice: shrinking back into the comfortable habits of the past or do the harder work of reinventing a city that would work for everyone. We chose the harder path. We chose people over politics. We chose action over excuses. And because of those choices, our city is stronger, fairer, and more resilient than when I walked into this office.

I came into office inheriting urgent problems and limited trust in city government. We found departments stretched thin, aging infrastructure, and neighborhoods that had been overlooked for too long. We confronted all of it directly — with urgency, with planning, and with the belief that good government means doing the basics well and doing them for everyone.

It's been quite a journey. Yet together, we created a revolutionary change in how Pittsburghers see one another, and in how City workers are empowered to serve with pride and purpose. We built a culture of respect, understanding, and accountability.

Residents came to see that their Mayor wouldn't only hear their concerns but also stand beside them in their neighborhoods. To make government more accessible, I created City in the Streets to bring department directors, bureau chiefs and my incredible Neighborhood Services team into communities, where we provided services and heard concerns firsthand. We took City Hall directly to 17 extreme and high need neighborhoods and attended 600 community meetings across the city, where we solved problems, set priorities and built stronger connections between residents and their city government.

Not everything we tried succeeded, but each mistake or setback became a stepping-stone for growth, a lesson in how to do better and be better. But, as you've heard me say before, I told my team to fall in love in with adversity; to roll up their sleeves; and to face challenges head-on.

My team worked tirelessly to build a city for all. One where hatred and division could not take root, where safety and opportunity belong to everyone. We created new pathways for every resident to thrive.

Today, I am proud to say that as I prepare to leave office, I leave our city in a stronger position even amid challenging times. We've built a government guided not by outside interests, but by the steadfast belief that what's best for the people of Pittsburgh must always come first.

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My budget proposal for the coming year seeks to preserve the progress we've made over the past 4 years, while continuing to acknowledge and prepare for challenging financial waters ahead.

To address the long-term effects of a changed real estate market post-COVID and the structural challenge of Pennsylvania's property assessment system, as well as the unprecedented retreat of the federal government from fulfilling its obligations to the American People, my budget proposal includes modest and targeted reductions in spending while avoiding any layoffs, while avoiding cuts to core services, and while avoiding an increase in taxes.

Our proposed budget eliminates dozens of vacant positions, some of which had been vacant for years and are no longer necessary, and others that were part of initiatives that we've scaled back or did not have adequate time to fully implement. We also cut \$3.5 million in non-personnel spending, tightening our belts where appropriate without depriving City departments of the resources they need to serve our residents.

We must tighten our belts for two primary reasons: a debt cliff ending in 2026, and the ongoing loss of real estate tax revenue caused by the common level ratio court ruling.

The debt cliff is a product of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been a challenge that my administration has warned of since taking office. In the Summer of 2020, with the economy shut down, tax revenue plummeting, and the prospect of federal aid uncertain, the City leaders at the time made the responsible choice to refinance debt payments, pushing out the repayment until 2025 and 2026. However, when federal aid did ultimately arrive, it was conditioned on support for the operating budget ending in 2024, the year before the refinanced payments would reach their peak. This has meant that this year and next, the City must make significant debt payments, at the exact same time we no longer have COVID relief funds to cushion the blow in other areas.

Luckily, our 5-year financial planning ordinance allowed my administration to see this challenge coming right from the start, and each budget we have produced has been structured to account for these lean years. Today, I am happy to report that in 2025, we have met the mark and remain on track to end the year with a modest surplus. My proposed 2026 budget is similarly designed to guide us through the end of this debt cliff, and we can see a significant improvement in the availability of funds beginning in 2027.

Declining Real Estate Tax revenue, on the other hand, isn't just a short-term setback; it's a shift with lasting implications for this city's financial future. Due to a court ruling on how property assessment reductions are calculated in appeal cases, we are projecting annual declines in property tax revenue for the first time since the closure of the steel mills.

Unlike the debt cliff, this challenge does not have a definite end point and will continue to grow until a County reassessment is completed. Absent that reassessment, we will eventually need to make more severe adjustments than those I propose today. However, we are once again aided by City Code, which requires us to build a 5-year fiscal plan. This has been in place since the City's exit from financial distress status and requires us to think ahead when making budgetary decisions. The 5-year plan allows us to see incoming challenges well in advance so that we can adjust for them gradually, without disruptive shocks to City Government.

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In the case of this year's budget, my team has been able to produce a spending plan that maintains financial balance through all five years of the forecast without having to resort to dramatic spending cuts or a tax increase. Each year, the incoming administration will have to closely monitor the out years of the plan to determine whether that course can be maintained. And it is important to remember that at any point, a reassessment could reset the common level ratio calculation, stop the annual decline in real estate tax collection, and prevent the need for more disruptive adjustments.

That is why I charge this council and the incoming administration to prioritize advocating for state legislation to modernize and improve our Commonwealth's laws governing property assessment, to avoid the need for more dramatic action now, and to prevent future generations from facing similar challenges. For my part, I pledge to work with Council between now and the end of the year to pass my longtime owner-occupant protection bill, ensuring that our most vulnerable homeowners are protected from the impact of a needed reassessment.

I am proud of my department directors for thinking critically about how each of their teams operate, and how they could operate better. Our City leaders used a mix of innovation and efficiencies, many brought to light by employees, to review and revise their existing budgets to maintain and improve services for residents and visitors.

In some cases, changes to existing positions will allow important programs to continue. In others, directors thought outside of the box to capitalize on relationships with the Commonwealth. City Council has already approved a partnership between the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and the State Department of Human Services to tap into additional revenue related to ambulance transports. This program will go live next year, so my budget directs these funds right back into EMS for staffing and vehicle needs. Public Works is doing something similar with state funding that is targeted for our roads. They are piloting a new initiative to use some of these funds for the needs of our fleet.

On the Capital side, this year OMB's Fleet team conducted a comprehensive condition assessment of our fleet for the first time. Based on this analysis, they re-worked all of our vehicle data to give me a list of cars, trucks, and heavy equipment that were at the top of the list for replacement. Across all funding sources, we've identified 50 vehicle replacements that address critical gaps in our fleet.

We don't have a lot of new state or federal money scheduled for 2026, but our project managers are still hard at work finishing projects that are already underway. Residents will see the completion of construction at several parks and public safety facilities next year.

We expect to receive \$17 million in federal funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to go to community projects that specifically help our most vulnerable residents. On behalf of the City, my administration joined other local governments this summer in a federal lawsuit to resist Trump's attacks on community development funding. The Courts granted us an injunction, and, for now, our programs can continue. To protect our residents who are most in need, the incoming administration must keep fighting in court so that these programs can continue without interruption.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the staff of the Department of Finance and the Office of Management and Budget for the extraordinary diligence they have shown in guiding us through this challenging period. They have faced an enormous task, and tackled it with professionalism, creativity,

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and, above all else, a deep empathy for the public servants and residents who are most directly impacted by our spending decisions. Balancing the financial bottom line with the real-world impacts of our decisions is no small feat. We did not shrink from that challenge and put our communities and their needs at the forefront of financial decision making.

Budgets and balance sheets illustrate part of the narrative, but the real story lies in what our investments represent. Let's take a moment to reflect on the purpose behind what we've done and the progress it has birthed across the city.

Our first major challenge and opportunity came at the very start of my administration, with the collapse of the Fern Hollow Bridge. That moment defined how we would govern: with urgency, collaboration, and accountability.

Through strong partnerships and relentless teamwork, we rebuilt that bridge in record time. But more importantly, we built a new system to ensure no resident will ever again have to fear crossing one of our bridges. That investment has paid off because today, we have no open bridges in failing condition. Let me say that again, no open bridges in failing condition.

Today, with continued investment in bridge maintenance and infrastructure in both the Operating and Capital budgets, this 2026 proposal keeps that promise to make Pittsburgh safer, stronger, and better connected.

The continued funding of the Bridge Asset Management Program ensures that our bridges are regularly inspected and maintained, with strong systems in place to keep them safe and reliable for everyone who depends on them. Some of this work is now done in-house, thanks to DOMI's new Bridge team.

The method we applied to evaluate, maintain, and repair our bridges is now being applied to all of our infrastructure, from retaining walls to sidewalks to sliding hillsides to our fleet. We know that catching up from years of deferred maintenance is a daunting and costly task but having a clear understanding of our needs enables us to make the most effective investments with the resources available to us.

We are also proud of the progress that's been made in the Office of Community Health and Safety, which has grown from a vision and a handful of employees to a robust alternative response office deploying 50 social workers and community health professionals to assist our neighbors in crisis. Our ROOTS team has assisted hundreds of unhoused people compassionately and effectively and today we stand as a national model for ending unsheltered homelessness, and returning public spaces to their intended uses.

We are also a national leader in law enforcement assisted diversion, which allows non-violent offenders to avoid incarceration and get back on track. We analyze our 911 data to identify frequent users of emergency services and have helped more than one thousand unique individuals to get the supports they need. And, because we are committed to continual improvement, we have recently shifted from a co-response to a crisis response model, to deploy social workers along with police to scenes of violence and trauma, while giving social workers more time and flexibility to meet residents in crisis where they are.

By the time I took office, two years of a global pandemic, and its new realities of quarantine, social distancing, and remote work, had taken its toll.

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Two trends had taken root. First, a growing homeless population had been pushed out of emergency shelter and onto our streets. Second, many employers and employees were questioning when, how, or even whether, to return to the office. When combined, a vicious cycle had emerged, where each trend fed off the other.

So, we invested heavily in focusing the energy of our ROOTS team to working with the unhoused who were concentrating in the Golden Triangle. Only by meeting the needs of the unhoused members of our community, as part of an “all-of-the-above” approach to public safety, would allow us to lead a reinvestment strategy to help transition Downtown into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood.

Working hand-in-hand with my Administration, the public sector, corporate community, foundations, cultural institutions, and Downtown-serving nonprofits came together in ways not seen in decades.

Our street level interventions allowed us to reduce actual and perceived safety and cleanliness challenges and to break that vicious cycle that was preventing employers from calling their workers back to the office. While that work was taking place, we crafted an ambitious but achievable plan to convert unoccupied office buildings to residential uses and reinvest in downtown's public realm to create a more inviting and multi-use experience for workers, residents, and visitors alike.

There were difficult choices to make along the way. It was a choice to lead with compassion and understanding for our unhoused neighbors when many called for their circumstances to be criminalized. It was a choice to ensure new housing downtown included affordable units, not just luxury condos.

And the results have been undeniable: a \$600 million reinvestment plan, over 1,000 planned units of new housing, Market Square renovations, the new Arts Landing Park, a police substation, public restrooms, the 500 in 500 initiative, and the NFL Draft. In the last four years we have brought downtown back from the brink and positioned it for a stable and successful future.

While addressing vacant and underutilized properties in downtown is critical, doing the same throughout our neighborhoods is even more vital to the future of Pittsburgh. The Land Bank always held the promise to serve as a pivotal tool in this work. However, despite the urgent need, it had not moved a single property in its first eight years.

As I have said before, these properties are a drain on the growth and vitality of the neighborhoods they occupy, are chronic threats to public health and safety, and deprive city government of much needed revenue to support other basic services.

That is why I am so proud of the work we have done to begin unlocking the potential of the Land Bank. Thanks to the work of my administration, the URA, the Land Bank Board – in particular Councilmen Lavelle, Wilson, and Mosley – and the Land Bank staff, the Land Bank has sold, or is in the process of, selling over 170 properties to expand community gardens and recreation spaces, support neighborhood business, and increase opportunities for affordable housing.

And I look forward to joining leaders from the County and PPS later this month to sign an intergovernmental cooperation agreement that finally secures their FULL participation in this work.

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Now, any of us who have been part of a community meeting know that engaging a single neighborhood on their shared vision for one project is incredibly hard. Engaging the entire city on a shared vision to guide Pittsburgh's growth through 2050? That's an entirely different ballgame.

Maybe that's why Pittsburgh has never had a comprehensive plan in its 200-year history, and previous efforts never materialized. However, I can't think of anything more important than ensuring that the growth of our city will be deeply rooted in the values of social, economic, and climate justice. The team in City Planning has engaged with over 25,000 residents all over the city, pairing the experience and wisdom of our communities with deep technical expertise to create the final plan – a document on schedule to be completed next year.

This is an opportunity the City has never had and I urge the next administration to embrace this work, to honor the voices contributed by so many of our neighbors, and to ensure that the future of our city has a place for everyone.

Of course, the heart of any city is its public servants, the people who devote themselves to delivering essential services to residents.

When we started, we encountered a workforce whose morale was unacceptably low and whose injury rates were unacceptably high. The two problems were not unrelated: in some departments, as many as one in five workers were off the job with a work-related injury, leaving their coworkers to accomplish just as much work, but with too few people. My administration chose to lift up the City workforce, by prioritizing safety and by giving every worker the tools, trust, opportunity and leadership they needed to succeed.

We put safety first, demanding that workers take every incident seriously, analyze its causes, and institute preventative measures. In this way we have dramatically reduced the number of days that workers are off the job by over half in DPW and saving the City close to \$5 million each year in workers' compensation. Attention to safety is not only a moral imperative. Full crews get the job done. One notable example is in our reactivated Clean and Lien Program, where we have increased the number of properties we are able to address fivefold, from 94 to 437, while reducing our cost per property by more than half.

For years, we have fallen short of our budgeted number of paramedics, resulting in units taken out of service, forced overtime, and burnout for the EMS workforce. Under the leadership of Chief Amera Gilchrist, the first Black and first woman chief of EMS, we created the Freedom House EMT Training Academy. We honor this legacy, because without the historic contributions of the Freedom House Ambulance Service, there would be no EMS today. The Academy is a pathway for community members to earn a paycheck while training to be an Emergency Medical Technician. Thanks to an innovative contract with the medics' union, those individuals can now progress to advanced EMT and from there to paramedic, and we are happy to say that in 2026 we will reach budgeted numbers in this critical bureau.

This successful career pipeline model is one that we're replicating in departments like DPW to allow frontline workers to learn the skills they need to take up higher paying positions like plumber and carpenter. And in our Bureau of Police, seasoned officers are laser-focused on mentoring potential recruits at every step of the training process, from application, through testing, and through the

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academy. This attention to recruitment and training has been critical to filling three classes a year in our reopened police academy.

This administration also tackled violence in the Black community through prevention and partnership. Our reauthorization of the Stop the Violence Fund and ongoing investment in community-based organizations, including the largest grant awards in the history of the fund, continue to pave the way for those working on the front lines to reduce violence and build safer neighborhoods.

These organizations are not just recipients of grants—they are guardians of our communities, advocates for change, and partners in the ongoing effort to build a safer, more resilient Pittsburgh. Our Violence Prevention Learning Line, launched in the Hilltop community is connecting young people and families with real-time support. The Safe Passages program expansion in Pittsburgh Public Schools has worked to interrupt the cycle of violence before it starts.

These organizations work hand-in-hand with our Office of Community Services and Violence Prevention, the REACH team, and the officers in the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. Together, these partnerships have led to incredible results. A historic 8-year low in homicides — down 37%, one of the steepest declines in the United States. Remarkably, in 2024, there were no homicide deaths among our youth ages 13 to 17. These aren't just numbers. These are lives saved, families kept intact, futures protected.

While we have made great progress, we cannot stop here. Despite the overall decline in violence, stark disparities remain: Black people still represent 85% of victims, in both homicides and non-fatal shootings. Black men and boys, their families, and communities, bear the heaviest burden. Correcting decades of disinvestment will take consistent and concentrated efforts over time to maintain results. As a City, we must remain firm in our commitment to invest directly in these communities and in our public health approach to ending gun violence until we achieve the goal of zero gun violence deaths.

The work of building a safer city doesn't stop at gun violence prevention. In fact, the leading cause of death among all young men in our city is a crash in our right of way.

Alarming data like this is why we committed to the Vision Zero initiative in 2024, a bold endeavor to end all traffic deaths and severe injuries in our city. We knew it would be hard work, but it's the kind of work worth doing because it saves lives.

Our approach combines smarter infrastructure, better road design, and upgraded signals with education, policy improvements, and investments in traffic safety. When fatal crashes occur, teams from across city departments come together to analyze what happened and make proactive changes to keep everyone safe. It's about enhancing mobility by protecting all road users.

Over the last four years we have committed \$3.5 million to traffic calming, with an additional 1.1 million proposed next year.

While improving traffic safety is essential to building communities where residents feel secure, true security is dependent upon having a stable place to call home.

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That's why we prioritized a people-centered response to our city's affordable housing crisis in a way that often put us at odds with powerful development interests that have grown comfortable with their outsized influence on Grant Street. But our focus remained on delivering for our residents.

We made the conscious decision to dedicate and secure record levels of public resources to invest in Pittsburgh's housing future. This included nearly \$40 million in ARPA funds, a record 18 low-income housing tax credit awards from the State over the last three funding cycles, and a \$50 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant from the federal government for Bedford Dwellings.

We made history by working with the URA to create Pittsburgh's first-ever Affordable Housing Bond, a \$32 million investment for our residents. Two years ago we said that this bond would allow us to produce or preserve more than a thousand fully affordable homes over three years and I am proud to report that the URA is on track to meet that goal *before* the end of next year ensuring that every family has a place to call home.

During my administration, we began the process of creating over 1,700 affordable units, which are completed, under construction, or in-process today, and with another 1,300 affordable units in the pipeline.

Thoughtful collaboration with our housing partners, community developers, and nonprofit organizations has allowed us to preserve existing affordable units, remove blight, and create new pathways for families, seniors, and young professionals to live and grow right here.

Case-in-point: working with the URA, we implemented the revolutionary OwnPGH program that has helped put over 194 new homeowners, with about 88% being women or minority heads of household and 76 being new residents to Pittsburgh, on a pathway to generational wealth through homeownership.

Choosing people over power will allow us to be a city where everyone, no matter their income, race, or circumstances can find a place to call home. But it is choice. Allowing the private sector to continue business as usual is a different choice. A choice that allows for the continued displacement of our low-income, black and brown neighbors.

For those that fought alongside us, and especially those that are not yet ready to abandon this fight, thank you. I remain shoulder-to-shoulder with you.

While we targeted resources to the development of new affordable housing, we also made sure to invest in the City departments responsible for development reviews and inspections.

Over the last four years, we have worked closely with the teams in PLI, City Planning, and DOMI to increase staffing levels, eliminate unnecessary permits and licenses, simplify applications, improve customer portals, and finally open the OneStopPGH counter. These improvements have been important steps in making it easier for residents and businesses to get things done and continuing to build upon this work will be needed as investment in the city grows.

There was a lot of understandable concern coming out of the pandemic about development and construction activity slowing down. However, the city is on pace to see over \$5 billion in total

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development since 2022, with last year representing a highwater mark for Pittsburgh of \$1.6 billion and this year on track to reach \$1.5 billion.

With the groundwork established with the improvements to the permitting process, our focus was naturally drawn to our procurement practices.

Every year, the City of Pittsburgh spends hundreds of millions of dollars purchasing the goods and services that allow our city to function. But the City is only one part of the public sector economy in this region. When you add the purchasing power of Allegheny County, the Sports and Exhibition Authority, the Parking Authority, Pittsburgh Water, the Housing Authority, and the Urban Redevelopment Authority, along with the state and federal dollars that support major development, you begin to see the scale of influence that public institutions hold in shaping our local economy. Procurement is not only about transactions, but also about transformation. As policymakers and purchasers, we play a critical role in determining who has access to opportunity.

From the beginning, I charged my team to lead by example. Every dollar we spend is a chance to build a fairer and more competitive economy, to support good jobs, to strengthen local business ownership, and to reflect our shared values.

At the same time, we are facing national efforts to weaken or eliminate programs designed to ensure fair access to public contracting. The Trump Administration is challenging Disadvantaged Business Enterprise programs across the country. In response, my administration took a proactive and courageous stance. We joined the King County v. Turner case to defend our constitutional authority to maintain and strengthen business diversity and other DEI programs here in Pittsburgh.

We have also continued to advance the Pittsburgh Regional Disparity Study to strengthen the necessary legal foundation to support our business diversity programs. This landmark study, the first in over twenty years, joined by the largest consortium of public agencies in our history, will help us understand where disparities exist, how our marketplace is functioning, and what changes are necessary to ensure that our public spending is fair, competitive, and growth-oriented.

Just last week, we announced new in-depth interviews and an online business survey to engage hundreds, and ultimately thousands, of businesses across our region, as well as chambers of commerce, lenders, funders, and technical assistance partners.

While we look forward to the final results of the study, we did not wait to make necessary changes. We strengthened internal standards for the preparation and advertisement of pre-bid meetings, expanded compliance and monitoring, updated contract language, and aligned our processes with both dormant provisions of City Code and best practices across the country.

Earlier this year, we improved how we evaluate Disadvantaged Business participation on all Invitation for Bid projects – clarifying expectations in solicitation documents, tightening good faith standards, relieving bidders who meet the goals from providing additional paperwork, evaluating participation before – not after – selecting a winning bidder, and rejecting bids that fail to provide the required documentation.

We piloted these reforms on the Brighton Heights Healthy Active Living Center project, and the results speak for themselves:

- Overall project participation: 34 percent DBE

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- General Contractor: 18.2 percent combined MBE and WBE participation
- Plumbing and HVAC: 25 percent combined MBE and WBE participation
- Electrical: 100 percent combined MBE, WBE, and VOSB participation

These changes not only ensure fairness and honest competition, they also raise the bar on accountability and properly place economic inclusion as a requirement for how we evaluate bids.

But, success in our economy goes beyond which businesses win contracts. It's also about who has access to good jobs on the construction sites that public dollars fund.

In October 2024, we announced the Regional Workforce Equity Agreement as a shared framework to expand opportunity for disadvantaged workers, strengthen apprenticeship pathways, and ensure job quality standards such as prevailing wage and anti-discrimination protections on publicly funded construction and real estate development projects. Since then, we have been hard at work implementing this framework and leading by example for our public partners across the region.

Our first pilot project under this framework, the new Schenley Heights Pavilion at Robert E. Williams Memorial Park, is now underway in partnership with our City departments, Partner4Work, and Partners for Public Good.

My administration has taken the first steps that are necessary for our City to continue. I especially look forward to the completion of the Disparity Study in 2026, to its public release, and to seeing how each participating agency will use its recommendations to remove barriers, expand access, and ensure that minority, women, LGBTQIA, and Veteran-owned businesses have real pathways to compete and succeed in both public and private contracting across our region.

But the responsibility to shape who benefits from public investment does not rest with a single administration and extends beyond the City of Pittsburgh.

Now is the time for other public institutions, like Allegheny County, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, the Parking Authority, Pittsburgh Water, the Sports and Exhibition Authority, and the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, to adopt and implement these models in their own procurement, construction, and development practices.

We are leaving behind comprehensive and ready-to-use models that ensure publicly funded projects do more than produce buildings and infrastructure. It ensures these investments build pathways, build skills, build wages, and build the futures of the people who live in the communities these projects serve.

This work is not about checking boxes or meeting quotas. It is about creating fair access to opportunity. It is about building a competitive marketplace that reflects the talent of this region. It is about ensuring that public dollars contribute to the public good.

Because when more of our businesses can grow, more of our people can work, and more of our neighborhoods can prosper, Pittsburgh becomes stronger for everyone.

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And that requires leadership, clarity, and the conviction to stand firm in the face of pressure and opposition.

For many years, Pittsburgh's population did not grow. But last year, that changed. Our city grew. We grew, in part, because we opened our doors, our neighborhoods, and our hearts to new residents, new families, and new immigrant communities who now call Pittsburgh home.

Our first International Day parade brought nearly 500 residents representing more than 30 national origins, marching through downtown with pride and joy and in the following year, participation nearly doubled to more than 900 people representing 40 nations. And this year, our focus on expanding language access and immigrant engagement earned our city a 3 -star Certified Welcoming designation, an achievement shared by only 37 cities in the United States. I look forward to celebrating this accomplishment at a convening next week with community partners, elected leaders, and organizations committed to ensuring that every resident can participate in shaping our shared future.

As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognized a major opportunity to reintroduce Pittsburgh to the world. Working in partnership with VisitPittsburgh and regional stakeholders, we developed a 10-year tourism plan that includes more than 40 strategies and 80 action steps to elevate the identity, culture, and vibrancy of our city and county.

Importantly, this plan lifts up African American heritage tourism, LGBTQIA cultural experiences, and the unique character of all 90 neighborhoods. And the world is taking notice. Recently, National Geographic named Pittsburgh one of the Best Places in the World to Travel To in 2026. We are the only city in the United States to receive this honor.

Next year, Pittsburgh will host one of the largest sporting events in the world, the NFL Draft, where we expect more than 700,000 visitors. Our responsibility is not only to showcase the beauty of our city, but also to ensure that our residents and small businesses benefit from this economic opportunity.

To support that goal, we've placed legislation before city council to update street vending zoning and business licensing policies. These changes will help cut outdated red tape, create more vibrant public spaces, and allow food trucks, pop-up markets, and neighborhood vendors to grow and thrive before, during, and long after the NFL Draft.

We are preparing this city to welcome the world. And I am grateful that the NFL believes in Pittsburgh's ability to host this moment and show who we truly are.

Each milestone we've reached tells a story of perseverance and heart. As we turn the page, I know my administration has planted seeds that will grow into something extraordinary with time.

Now I want to close with gratitude. To the city workers who show up every day — the operators of our plows and our IT infrastructure, the inspectors who keep our buildings safe, the officers, firefighters, and emergency responders who respond in our worst hours, the crews who clean our streets and staff our recreation centers, the people who review development plans, design traffic calming projects, and more, thank you. You are the backbone of this city.

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To the community leaders, nonprofits, businesses, unions, and the countless neighbors who rolled up their sleeves and joined us. thank you.

To my family especially the love of my life Michelle, who has been beside me every step of this journey, thank you.

To the staff who carried the burden and the joy of public service alongside me: I could not have done this without you. Thank you.

This administration has accomplished in four years what others could not or would not in eight. We've stood in the gap for our residents, protecting their safety, their opportunities, and their future.

From revitalizing our neighborhoods to expanding opportunity for working families, we've proven that progress is possible when everyone has a seat at the table.

I want to take a moment to thank the people—the heart of this city—whose resilience, faith, and determination have carried us through every challenge.

To those who didn't believe in this administration, I thank you as well. Your doubt became a source of reflection and growth, pushing us to do better, to reach higher, and to serve more faithfully.

I want to give love and say thank you to every part of this City, and I also want to recognize a few particular neighborhoods. To the people of the Hill District that embraced my family, Oakland that birthed me, East Liberty that raised me, Homewood that educated me, East Hills that received me, and Garfield that moved me, all of you played such an important role in my personal and professional development, thank you. Without you, there's no me. Your support and belief have shaped the leader I've become.

To all residents: we brought government to you because YOU are the reason we serve. Every decision, every program, every late night was about uplifting the people and about making sure that every voice is heard, and every neighborhood feels seen.

Thank you, Pittsburgh, for believing in my administration's journey toward a more just, humane, and prosperous future for every one of us.

It has been an honor to serve as your Mayor. I am profoundly grateful for the partnership, trust, and hope that the people of this great city placed in me.

Together, we've shown that when we lead with heart, fairness, and purpose, we can build a city that truly works for everyone.

So, let us NOT return to the ways of old that may have felt comfortable, but held us back. Instead, let us keep moving forward with courage, with vision, and with an unwavering commitment to growth.

That's what progress looks like; not perfection, but persistence.

Thank you.