

2024

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# STATE *of the* CITY

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Brandon M. Scott  
Mayor

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Baltimore — good evening!

Thank you for being here tonight and sharing an unparalleled commitment to our beautiful city..

Let me begin by thanking my partners...

Council President Mosby, Comptroller Henry, the entire city council.

Even when we come down on the opposite sides of an issue, I know your dedication to our residents knows no bounds.

Also, thank you to our state elected officials who are here this evening.

To the members of my cabinet and members of city government, thank you for answering the call to make a difference in the lives of Baltimoreans everyday.

And, lastly, to every community partner, activist, and resident who is here tonight or may be watching at home ... Your spirit is what makes Baltimore special.

Tonight, I am here for my fourth State of the City address, and I am happy to report that the state of our city is stronger and more resilient than ever.

There is still so much work to do, but we must acknowledge how far we have come in just a few short years.

When I gave my first State of the City Address in 2021 — I stood at a podium like this one ... alone ... giving this speech virtually as a deadly global pandemic continued to take its toll on our city.

We had a virus to fight; vaccines to distribute; businesses to support; and lives to save from both covid and violence. And let's be honest both the pandemic and epidemic had Baltimore in a choke hold.

Reflecting on those moments, it is jarring to see how far our city has come ...

Last year we achieved the largest single-year reduction in homicides Baltimore has ever seen, and we're continuing that reduction this year ...

We're welcoming new investments, developments and projects; new schools and rec centers; and new opportunities for all Baltimoreans.

We're strengthening the parts of our city that were damaged by the pandemic — rebuilding many city services, using ARPA dollars to support our most vulnerable neighbors, and reducing unemployment to the lowest level our city has ever seen.

Baltimore is at an inflection point in our history, and each of us has the power to choose the direction we take.

When I took office Baltimore's infrastructure was broken, both literally and figuratively.

We needed to tackle decades of intentional disinvestment, restore consistency and stability to city government after more than 15 years of chaos and scandal, and set the stage for Baltimore's renaissance to truly take hold and flourish.



We know these things take time and require us to speak hard truths.

Equity, transparency, accountability and integrity — have all been at the core of our work.

For me, a son of Park Heights, who endured the first-hand impacts of a neighborhood neglected —

I knew that Baltimore needed to do better, and Baltimoreans deserved better.

I have always said that I want to be the Mayor who laid a foundation for a new golden age in Baltimore.

That has been my promise, and tonight it is easy to see the progress.

When I took office, Baltimore had been grappling with spiking homicides since 2015, with the city regularly seeing more than 300 Baltimoreans killed every year.

Something had to give. So we got to work outlining and then implementing Baltimore's first-ever Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan.

The first ever — for Baltimore — in 2021.

No more disjointed strategies, failed zero tolerance policing, or half-baked diversion programs.

Done with the false choice of investing in law enforcement or investing in community violence intervention.

Our approach is both-and. And it has to be.

We've built a plan that supports our community violence intervention ecosystem, established a nationally recognized 9-1-1 diversion program that resolved over 600 incidents with community-based responders rather than police, and expanded our victim-services work.

As a young Black man in Baltimore — I have personally seen the negative impact of the misguided, disjointed approaches of the past.

I've lost friends and loved ones to gun violence, to addiction, to the criminal justice system — and have been the victim of violence myself.

But I've found purpose in the movements to save lives...

Leading the 300 Men March and working alongside We Our Us and the many organizations who fight to make their community safer everyday.

Those experiences drive my commitment to this work.

They ground my belief that we must continue to embrace community-centered, evidence-driven, public-health approaches that treat violence like the complex, public health crisis it is.

In 2023, we managed to achieve the largest single-year reduction in homicides Baltimore has ever seen — ever — reducing homicides by 20%.



It marked the first time Baltimore had less than 300 homicides a year in nearly a decade.

And so far this year, we're building on top of that reduction, dropping another 21% in homicides and 12% in nonfatal shootings.

It is not yet enough — it will never be enough until we do not lose a single one of our neighbors to violence.

But this progress showcases that our strategy is working. Now is the time to double down, not to pull back or return to the failed, broken policies of the past.

We know that much of the problem is due to the proliferation of guns on our streets.

Small, everyday conflicts escalate into horrific violence in the presence of too many guns.

We've seen it too many times, including last summer at the Brooklyn Mass Shooting.

Alongside all of our law enforcement partners, we are going after guns in our communities — focusing on everyone, from those who pull the trigger to those who supply the weapons.

BPD recovered over 2,900 guns in 2023 — including hundreds of ghost guns.

So far, this year they've seized 596 guns, an 11% increase — including 86 ghost guns.

The brave men and women of BPD, like the Detectives in the Group Violence Unit — some of whom are here tonight — have helped takedown drug trafficking organizations like the one in Irvington, where they got illegal narcotics, firearms and violent offenders out of that community.

In the courts, we went after Polymer80 — the nation's largest ghost gun manufacturer — securing a historic \$1.2 million in damages and effectively ending their business with Maryland residents all together.

And we've filed suit against the ATF to finally get full access to crime gun tracing data.

Our fight is not with our partners at the ATF — who do incredible work and support BPD everyday.

Our fight is with the unconscionable Tiahrt Amendment pushed by Republican Members of Congress, which ties the hands of ATF and ties the hands of BPD, who are not allowed to share the tracing data they utilize with me or any other policymaker.

On top of that, we're remaining focused on quality of life crimes, honing in on auto theft and bringing carjackings down 15% last year and another 5% this year.

In fact, BPD's quality of life calls for service are down 18% across the board from this time last year.

We are doing this the right way, not by pushing to meet quotas or through illegal stop-and-frisk.

We're doing it with focused enforcement, while cutting illegal arrest in half and while achieving compliance in whole sections of the Consent Decree for the first time in its 7-year history.



Commissioner Worley — we're turning the department into one that serves Baltimore's residents the way they should have been served all along.

While many are not, we are a city actively graduating police academy classes, we redistricted for the first time in 60 years, and we're finally on the verge of securing Local Control of BPD.

A fight I've led my entire time in public service, and I encourage residents to finalize it this November at the ballot box — to ensure BPD is actually accountable to Baltimoreans.

My Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement under Director Mavronis continues to lead this comprehensive work.

Staffed by some of the most dedicated, caring, and diligent staff in City government — their work is changing lives and perceptions about public safety.

They spearhead work on the Group Violence Reduction Strategy led by Terence Nash — which we run in partnership with the State's Attorney's Office, Office of the Attorney General, and the BPD — where we leverage community moral voice partners like Derwin Hannah from Southwest Baltimore to engage directly with those responsible for driving violence.

We offer them a choice — directly in a letter from me — put down the guns and let us help you change your life or face the consequences for continuing to be involved in violence.

In fact, at my step-son's basketball game on Friday night ... a young man came up to me and showed me a picture of the letter he received.

He said he had already taken us up on our offer and is now connected to services through Roca.

We know this works and you don't just have to believe me — the University of Pennsylvania's Crime and Justice Policy Lab found that GVRS drove a 25% cumulative reduction in homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as a 33% reduction in carjackings in its first 18 months in the Western District.

This focused deterrence strategy is succeeding where others have failed because of the buy-in from my office and our partners — and the actual support we're offering those who choose to change their life.

After expanding the strategy to the Central District earlier this year, we are well on our way to completing expansion to the Eastern District next month.

Increasing public safety also means healing communities impacted by violence.

Programs like Safe Streets, We Our Us, the PEACE Team, and Challenge2Change work in the streets with high-risk individuals to mediate conflicts and shift the culture around gun violence.

And MONSE's Victim Services Team does life-changing work. Their support of victims, families, and witnesses could be the difference-maker for someone.

Like it was for Justin Wilkes, who got assistance from MONSE's team after a police-involved shooting took place in his neighborhood. With their help, he was able to get on the right path, hold down a job and improve his mental health.



Once they work with someone, they don't just disappear.

Their Coordinated Neighborhood Stabilization Response brings whole communities together to feel the full weight of our support — often for extended periods of time.

Like they're doing in Brooklyn, where their continued support is still making an impact alongside neighborhood stakeholders like the tenant council, faith leaders like Bishop John Watts and Pastor Billy Humphrey, and residents like Lavette Hyman and my good friend, young Mason Conway, a budding advocate and the Mayor of Brooklyn.

We must not slow down — there has been too much progress.

I've made it clear to Deputy Mayor Barksdale, BPD, MONSE, and every single agency that falls under me that we will carry our momentum forward.

Baltimoreans' lives and the future of Baltimore are on the line.

In the coming weeks, my administration will release the first biennial update of Baltimore's Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan — outlining our progress and improving our strategies.

This update includes, for the first time, a specific Youth Justice pillar.

A little less than a year ago, I also tasked Deputy Mayor Dzirasa with convening the Youth Violence Reduction Workgroup — which includes city and state agencies, community stakeholders, and young people themselves.

And earlier this month, we were informed we're receiving a \$738,000 federal earmark to support School-Based Violence prevention efforts.

Too often, I arrive on the scene of a homicide to find a victim or perpetrator who hasn't even gotten a chance at a full life.

Those scenes — like Brooklyn Day — are the most gut-wrenching.

As a new Dad — blessed with a step-son and a new baby boy — the stakes are all too real for me.

Our young people deserve a chance at a hopeful future, which means focusing on their safety, addressing their specific needs, and — hear me when I say this — ensuring accountability when needed.

From Intensive Case Management and Out-of-School Time programming, we must consider the whole young person in all parts of their life.

With the success of our Squeegee Collaborative — which has reduced squeegee-related incidents by 85 percent — SideStep Youth Diversion, and last year's "Bmore This Summer" youth engagement strategy ... We know what works.

With Spring Break underway, we are already proactively working on youth safety for the warmer months and are building on the lessons learned from last year.

Together, we increased youth and community engagement, registering more than 3,500 young people for more than a dozen events hosted by my office throughout the summer months.



Young people themselves told us what they wanted to see — Teen Pool Parties, bringing back Midnight Basketball, Block Parties from back in the day, and launching new activities.

This summer, it will all be back.

It's not just special activations though.

I am a product of rec centers and the access to opportunities they provided growing up — but at some point that access changed.

For years, mayors said they prioritized youth, without backing that up — shutting down rec centers and defunding programs.

I was determined to lead differently, and show our young people they are worth more than empty promises and shuttered doors.

Gone are the days where we will balance the budget on the backs of our children.

We must prioritize them and put our money where our mouth is.

Over the past three years, we have made a historic \$120 million investment in our City's recreation centers, playgrounds, and parks.

Last year, we started construction on new Chick Webb and Parkview Recs.

This week, we'll reopen Medfield Rec.

Next month we'll break ground at Gardenville Rec —

And Councilwoman Porter, later this year we'll start on the new rec center for Brooklyn and Curtis Bay.

We've installed five brand-new playgrounds and upgraded 26 play spaces throughout the City.

And we're continuing our work to repair and enhance the City's pools — for lots of facilities it's the first time they've been touched since they were built.

Last year, we began construction on the Ambrose Kennedy and Walter P. Carter pools.

And, hear it from me, Councilman Cohen, Patterson Park pool will be open this summer.

Fighting for our kids is a collective effort.

And, with Maryland's Blueprint, I am proud to have invested more in education than any other Mayor in history ... helping us make progress inside and outside the classroom.

Our schools CEO Dr. Santelises is here. I'm extremely proud that while she's had FOUR mayors, I've only had ONE CEO.



Despite the critics intentionally misleading about what City Schools is accomplishing — I will tell you a simple truth: our educators, students, and families are on the rise.

Initiatives like Headstart are helping families raise healthier, happier children more likely to succeed in school.

Judy Centers and City Schools Pre-K are helping our students outperform the state overall in Kindergarten readiness —

And elementary and Middle School students are making gains in English Language Arts.

There is, of course, more work to do — particularly in Math.

We're standing with City Schools as they expand middle schools athletics — now offering more sports than any other urban school district in the country.

Closing those gaps starts with making sure schools support our student's whole development — and getting them there on-time, every day.

Which is why we launched the Mayor's Attendance Challenge.

Already this year, daily attendance has increased year-to-year up to 88%.

And chronic absenteeism has been reduced by nearly 12% across all City Schools.

I want to shout out our first winners of the Mayor's attendance challenge — Principal Ford from Booker T Washington, Principal Wilson from BDJ, and Principal Young from Excel Academy who have produced some of the most pronounced increases in attendance in the district.

Supporting our young people also means ensuring they have a bright future ahead.

Last year, Baltimore experienced its lowest unemployment rate ever and our city had the eighth fastest growing economy in the country.

We're harnessing all that growth so that all Baltimoreans can take part.

After 50 years of giving Baltimore's young people summer jobs — Youthworks has seen two back-to-back record years for applications and everyone who applied was offered a job.

Now, more than 200 have received offers to be part of the first Youthworks Year-Round cohort.

Thank you Director Garvin and the Youthworks team for helping make these young people's dreams a reality.

We're also recruiting at City Hall.

Last month, I established The Mayor's HBCU Fellowship Program — an opportunity for recent graduates from Morgan State or Coppin State to come serve the City of Baltimore in much-needed positions.

They'll get work experience, career coaching, housing incentives, and competitive salaries.



And we'll keep Baltimore's best talent here working for our communities.

But our opportunities are not just for college grads.

Tonight, I am announcing that on April 25th, we will host a citywide hiring fair at the War Memorial Building.

Across the city, you will hear a simple message: "Baltimore...is...hiring."

City government offers great jobs with a true opportunity to build a life, buy a home, and support a family. It is the honor of a lifetime to serve this city.

Just ask employees like Sadie Whitt, who has worked at the Pratt Library for 61 years, and Joyce Dixon, an office supervisor who has worked for BPD for 59 years.

Working for the City of Baltimore is an opportunity to be part of the bigger change we're making in city government.

After more than a decade of scandal and chaos, we're restoring trust and stability.

We are building a government that works for all Baltimoreans - not just the wealthy and well-connected that want to buy their seat at the table.

The government we are building is a government fueled by the people that want the best for Baltimore.

Neighbors like Antonio Boyd, President of the Fort Worthington Community Association, where he fights for his community everyday, and Ms. Audrey Carter, one of Baltimore's guardians and a longtime advocate in the Oliver community.

Antonio and Ms. Audrey are the kind of neighbors that fuel our progress.

Here is what I know:

No matter the neighborhood, Baltimoreans all want the same thing —

A government that is responsive...

A government that moves with a big, bold vision for our city...

And a government that delivers basic city services - the right way.

We've doubled down on reforming our antiquated systems.

We're reforming the city's decades old procurement processes and we secured new technology to overhaul our tax and permitting systems.

I implemented agency performance plans, and actually expanded the CitiStat model.

And, with a \$3 million grant, we grew our Bloomberg I-Team making it the largest I-team in the country.



All of these reforms serve to make our city function better, more efficiently, and with less waste for Baltimoreans — so that we can tackle the big, intractable challenges that face our city services.

As I stand here before you — we’ve stabilized many of the core services that were deeply impacted by years of City Hall dysfunction and a global pandemic.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the progress of DPW, and their two most high profile responsibilities — water and trash.

At my last State of the City address: I made a promise ... to restart weekly recycling in Q1 of 2024.

I am proud to report, I delivered on that promise.

And we did it in the right way...the sustainable way ... the truthful way.

We grew our solid waste workforce by hiring or promoting 35 new drivers and 74 new solid waste workers, driving down their vacancy rate to the lowest level in years.

They join the ranks of many dedicated, essential workers in the solid waste bureau and all of our city agencies who tirelessly do the most unglamorous and thankless work in our city.

One of our crews is here tonight — let’s give them a round of applause.

For the first time ever, we put GPS in our vehicles and no longer use paper maps.

And we right-sized our recycling routes.

We purchased 80 new load packer trucks to modernize our fleet.

And we brought back a transformational leader, Khalil Zaied, who will lead the Department of Public Works into the future.

I want to thank Richard Luna, Craig Jeter, Yvonne Moore Jackson, Berke Attila — and so many others that worked diligently to get recycling back sustainably.

We’ve also completed two projects that dogged multiple former administrations.

For decades, Ashburton and Druid Lake serviced Baltimore’s residents being exposed to the elements, failing to meet EPA regulations.

I am proud to say that the DPW teams worked around the clock to finally get it done, completing the projects last November and December, despite some persistent misinformation to the contrary.

Every other administration had the opportunity — but this team had the resolve to finish the job.

This year, as we examine the recommendations of the Baltimore Regional Water Task Force, we will ensure that Baltimore’s water system REMAINS Baltimore’s system, while improving regional governance.

We’ve also seen incredible progress at our two waste-water treatment plants at Patapsco & Back River.



Their troubled history has been a reflection of many of the persistent challenges that face many city services: aging infrastructure, staffing challenges, and neglect from those in charge.

But we changed that.

And now those plants are working better than they have in decades, and now they're putting out their lowest effluent numbers ever — meaning our water is cleaner and our communities are healthier.

This progress means something.

At no point in the last 50 years has our Harbor been healthier than it is now — making it swimmable most days of the year, bringing back wildlife and sea life that was thought impossible for most of my lifetime.

Yes, there are crabs in harbor again!

That's what a healthier environment in our city looks like. And I expect to see each and everyone of you kayaking alongside me in the harbor on Waterfront Partnership's Baltimore Blueway this summer!

Keeping our neighborhoods and city clean is a daily effort that takes not just the women and men of DPW — but each and every one of us.

Trash, litter, and illegal dumping have plagued our city for decades.

Our ARPA-funded Clean Corps initiative has been a tremendous success in cleaning up our neighborhoods while empowering residents.

Contrary to what some may think — this is not supplanting DPW's work — it's leveraging community partners like neighborhood associations and non-profits who want to serve our city.

Fueled by folks like Davon Taylor, a Clean Corps member who was out picking up trash in Druid Heights when he sprang into action to help save a woman from a burning building on West North Avenue last November.

Their impact is real — removing nearly 700 tons of trash from our streets and lots.

However, we must confront a harsh truth: while cleaning up is vital, it's only a part of the solution. We cannot merely clean our way out of a dumping problem; we must eradicate the root cause.

Illegal dumping is not just littering; it's an offense against our community and our city's soul.

When someone dumps in someone's yard, they deliver a message about what they think our residents are worth — nothing but a pile of trash.

For those who do it — be warned. Our housing department's Special Investigations Unit continues to expand our camera network, now with over 100 locations, putting eyes on the ground and catching perpetrators in the act.

We're fighting in Annapolis to expand that unit's powers to identify and pursue perpetrators like seeking driver's license photos and gathering info on social media.



But we must change the fines too. The penalty for illegal dumping in our neighborhoods cannot simply be “the cost of doing business.”

When one individual dumps 3.6 tons of tires in Poppleton and is fined a mere \$500 ...

A slap on the wrist is a slap in the face of our residents.

That’s why I will be calling for a Charter Amendment to significantly increase the maximum civil penalty for illegal dumpers — and deliver the message that our city will not be your dumping ground.

Effectively handling our waste is about safeguarding our residents.

We must modernize our systems, and double down on proven strategies like recycling and composting to reduce incineration and landfill waste.

Councilmember Conway ... we were recently awarded a \$4M grant by the EPA to develop a solar-powered, scalable composting facility co-located with the new Eastside Transfer Station.

This is an environmental justice issue.

Councilwoman Porter, I know you know this all too well. We have communities in our city that are in the 99th percentile for asthma, and in the 96th percentile for proximity to hazardous waste.

Every neighborhood in Baltimore deserves to be clean, safe, and respected. This is not just about beautification; it’s about health in our city.

From COVID to maternal health to heart disease to the opioid epidemic — the work of our Baltimore City Health Department saves lives every day.

Just the other week, I officially swore in Dr. Emenuga, our city’s new Health Commissioner.

She is bringing her incredible wealth of experience and deep love for this city to her work on behalf of our residents.

In maternal and child health, we’ve reached a historic low infant mortality rate.

Partnerships like B’More for Healthy Babies are helping us eliminate the disparities between Black and White moms in targeted neighborhoods.

We’re protecting abortion care and access to reproductive rights in the wake of a Trump-backed Supreme Court eliminating women’s rights.

Last year, we granted nearly \$300,000 to organizations that provide abortion and family planning services.

As long as I have a say, Baltimore will always defend reproductive rights. Always!

We’ve also expanded our protections for Baltimore’s LGBTQ+ residents, revitalizing the Commission, and last year establishing some of the strongest anti-discrimination laws in the country.



Every institution we have helps expand access to necessary health and social services.

Like the Pratt Library System, who is a national leader in this model, ensuring our libraries are not just a place for books, but where community connections exist.

Whether it's distributing thousands of laptops in partnership with my office or their expansion of social impact programs like Lawyer in the Library, Social Worker in the Library, Wellness at the Pratt, and Peer Navigators — Pratt is often the difference maker for our residents in need.

As one Baltimorean put it after a Pratt-based social worker helped him get health insurance after returning home from prison, they are “the bridge between possibilities and probabilities.”

That is the impact of our work, Interim CEO Graham!

Our commitment to our residents extends their entire lifetime. Under my leadership, Baltimore has overwhelmingly improved how we care for the city's older adults.

By establishing the Mayor's Office of Older Adult Affairs & Advocacy, and getting its first ever Director Ms. Ondoria Harmon, confirmed — we have opened a new chapter for our seniors.

This office is already connecting more seniors to services they need, like:

telehealth services;

expanding connections to Maryland Access Point program — which serviced 9% more calls last year;

and learning how to take advantage of programs like Housing Upgrades to Benefit Seniors (or HUBS) and home repair grants, which enable thousands of older adults to age in place with the grace and dignity they deserve.

One of the most damaging public health challenges our city continues to face is the opioid epidemic.

Killing nearly three times as many people in our city than gun violence, no one in Baltimore has escaped the impact of this crisis.

Through the Health Department, we are deploying every resource we can; including community-based providers in our overdose spike alert responses; and recommitting funding for our mobile response van, which provides judgment-free and accessible clinical care and social services to those at risk of overdose.

We're also standing up the Mayor's Overdose Prevention Cabinet and redoubling our work with partners like Behavioral Health System Baltimore, Charm City Care Connection, Baltimore Crisis Response Inc, and the Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition, some of whom are here tonight.

Our first responders face the dire circumstances of this epidemic everyday.

In July 2023, we deployed the Fire Department's new population health unit to aid in our overdose prevention work.

So far they've distributed 6,000 NARCAN kits throughout the city, contributing to a 29 percent reduction in overdose responses in the 30 days following their distribution to an area.



Overall, between August 2023 and February 2024, Baltimore has seen an 18% reduction in overdose responses compared to the same period a year before.

Our Fire Department is no stranger to risking their own lives to save others — and in the past few years they've lost far too many.

But our city and this department always rallies to support each other.

I am proud to say this administration has rallied to support them too. In the course of the last few years, my administration has invested \$26 million in our aging fire fleet and apparatus — and there is more support to come.

In the next few weeks, I will announce additional investments to make long overdue improvements to fire stations, the fire academy, and safety equipment.

Their work supporting Baltimore's most vulnerable residents is invaluable.

Just the other week, we were together in Southeast Baltimore — sitting with the family who lost three young lives in a house fire.

After that tragedy, everyone mobilized.

The Fire Department and the Red Cross distributed more than 85 smoke alarms.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and community partners provided translation services.

And MONSE, MOCFS, and numerous other agencies deployed all of their wraparound services.

That was a neighborhood in need, and this administration showed up, just as we do every single day.

Protecting Baltimore's most vulnerable residents is a sacred responsibility.

It's why you see so much focus on issues of homelessness and housing security from my Administration.

In just the past few months — we've successfully purchased two hotels to support the efforts of Director Simmons and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services.

We're expanding our emergency shelter space and, through our Housing Accelerator, awarded \$30 million in ARPA funds to build more permanent supportive housing.

And we've continued our eviction prevention efforts, making us the only jurisdiction in the state still providing active rental assistance to families.

Solving the housing challenges in our city means supporting equitable neighborhood development in every way we can.

Under my administration, community is truly part of our community development.

Building a better Baltimore must benefit current residents.



To those of you who, like me, have lived in forgotten neighborhoods - I see you and promise that you will be there to reap the rewards.

Baltimore is going to show DC, New York, Detroit, and LA what it means to have development without displacement.

Working with Annie Milli at Live Baltimore, we rolled out Buy Back the Block - designed to assist longtime renters who want to become homeowners and stay in their neighborhood.

Buy Back the Block enabled Ms. Shannon Clifton to purchase a home in her community and over 100 other renters have been given the green light to utilize the \$10,000 grant to do the same.

Congratulations Ms. Clifton!

Never before have we seen the types of investments flowing into our city.

Thanks to President Biden and the best Congressional delegation a Mayor could ask for, national investments from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are bringing billions into our city for projects like the Frederick Douglass Tunnel, improvements to Penn Station, the Howard Street Tunnel, and upgrades to our Light Rail Fleet.

We're also receiving federal infrastructure money for the Druid Park Lake Drive and a reconnecting communities grant to begin to overcome the wrong done by the "Highway to Nowhere."

To ensure we are maximizing this opportunity, the Mayor's Office of Infrastructure Development led by Matt Garbark will host an infrastructure summit in May to connect small businesses with billions in infrastructure investments.

There are already beacons of what charting a bright, bold future for our city looks like.

I saw a glimpse of the future of our city in the Summer of 2023, when I — a Black Mayor of Baltimore — was out personally knocking doors to convince the Black homeowners in Edmondson Village to repeal racist covenants, so that a Black developer could take over the long-troubled Edmondson Village shopping center.

Now, Lynier Richardson has organized Southwest Baltimore residents to take part in co-ownership of the project.

Lifelong E.V. resident Ms. Lashelle Bynum was understandably skeptical at first.

Skeptical because for decades, City and State leaders promised Ms. Bynum, and her neighbors, life-changing projects, without having any resources to deliver. It's easy to be discouraged when there's a history of projects like the Red Line being canceled.

But we're changing that history.

With a \$12 million investment from the city, the long—stalled Uplands development is on the path to completion with over 150 affordable units and affordable homeownership opportunities on the way.

And across the street, the Edmondson Village Shopping Center is finally headed towards redevelopment.

Once the justified skeptic, Ms. Bynum joins us tonight as a proud investor in the shopping center that anchors her life-long neighborhood.



Thank you Ms. Bynum, and all of your neighbors, for joining in the effort to move our city forward.

These developments are hard. No one knows that more than my West Baltimore brother Dave Bramble.

His work with Harborplace will breathe new life into our downtown. After it sat languishing in receivership for years, Dave and his team stepped up to finally make a change.

It's not news to say that I support the plan to redevelop Harborplace — but if this is the first you've heard of Dave Bramble's work — just know that his work in neighborhoods across Baltimore is even more inspiring.

From Reservoir Hill to Greektown and Northwood, projects like his are driving Baltimore's renaissance in every part of our city.

Too often in Baltimore's history, there has been a division between Downtown and the rest of our neighborhoods...

But we know that one cannot thrive without the other. That's why we are investing in both.

Like cities all across the country, our downtown is at a crossroads.

And we are charting our path forward with Downtown RISE: A Roadmap for Investment, Support, and Equity.

Whether you're coming downtown for work or to see a show at CFG Arena — one of the top 10 highest grossing venues of its size in the world — or joining the Orioles for Opening Day on Thursday ...

Downtown is a gathering place for all of Baltimore — despite some who claim no one goes downtown.

But our focus is equally on our neighborhoods

Baltimore — the birthplace of redlining — bears the scars of that history.

Vacants have always been a symbol of the intentional disinvestment in our neighborhoods.

Like so many of you, I have never known a Baltimore without them.

They lined my walk to school and surrounded the courts I used to play on.

I saw trees growing out of vacant houses instead of lining our streets.

In Park Heights — famous for one day a year during the Preakness and forgotten every other day — we knew the impact that blight could have on a neighborhood.

And on our sense of safety and hope.

We all know the urgency.

For two decades, our vacant problem was stagnant — stuck at 16,000 vacants across the city.

We were spending hundreds of millions giving tax breaks to downtown developments, with fractions of that going to our most visible development problem.



At the rate we were going four years ago, it would take 375 years to fix the vacants problem.

That's why over the last three years my administration has invested a historic \$146 million into our neighborhoods.

Alongside ReBuild Metro, Black Women Build, and so many others — that investment helped us get down to 13,531 vacant properties, a more than 14% reduction since I took office.

And the lowest that we've had in 20 years.

In December of last year, we joined with BUILD and GBC to announce our historic vision to put \$3 Billion forward — over the next 15 years — to finally eliminate vacants once and for all.

This vision includes \$300 million from the City of Baltimore - the largest investment in our neighborhoods ever.

I want to thank Commissioner Kennedy and Director Mocksten for leading the charge in developing this strategy that combines city, state, philanthropic, and private funding.

And thank you to Governor Moore, Secretary Day, and their teams - it's great to have partners in Annapolis committed to this strategy.

A strategy so good that others are copying it and calling it their own.

The vision we put forward in December would make us the first city in the United States to issue non-contiguous TIF bonds targeted at vacant properties.

Council President Mosby, you can expect that legislation on your desk this summer.

As I quoted in that announcement, Isaiah chapter 61 verse 4 tells us

“Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins,

They will raise up the former devastations;

And they will repair the ruined cities;

The desolations of many generations.”

And that's what we all will do together!

Baltimore deserves bold leadership that never shies away from a challenge and sets a vision for what this city can be.

This is a once in a lifetime plan — and a golden opportunity.

This job requires a lot of hard choices.

On the day I took office, I promised that I would always do what is right, not what is popular or politically beneficial for me.



I stand by that today.

Next week, I will introduce this coming year's preliminary budget. As was widely reported, we were staring down a \$100 million structural deficit.

I am proud to report that the budget we will put forward completely covers the gap — without furloughing employees, without closing rec centers or fire stations, and without cutting city services or turning our back on the priorities moving Baltimore forward.

The results of our hard choices don't include balancing the budget on the backs of the things hardworking Baltimoreans need everyday.

So many parts of my administration's vision has been denounced by those pessimistic about Baltimore.

Our goal to reduce homicides by 15 percent was laughed at ... until last year when we got it done.

Our Squeegee Collaborative was derided as doomed to fail, but you can see the success.

Our \$3B vision to address the vacants crisis has already been called "overly complicated and insanely ambitious."

Every new project is faced with naysayers who find a reason why it can't get done.

But every time we show them why it can.

Here me when I say this:

I don't align with those who are pessimistic about Baltimore and nostalgic for a past that did not work for people who look like me.

I align with those who are bullish on Baltimore — and that is always a safe bet!

Baltimore doesn't back down from a challenge.

We don't give up.

And we fight for our city.

You, my fellow Baltimoreans, are our city's greatest asset - and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Yes, our vision is ambitious, but that is what this moment demands.

I'm fighting for you, and I will do everything in my power to make sure that Baltimore's renaissance benefits all of us.

This moment in our city's history calls for a leader that will get things done, a leader that can't be bought, a leader with unshakeable integrity — built with Baltimore grit.

We've identified how to tackle gun violence in our city, and we're seeing the results.



We've invested in our young people, and we've delivered more rec centers, more new schools, and more opportunities for them.

We've stabilized a city government that for nearly 15 years had only known instability and scandal.

We've brought together unprecedented coalitions to tackle our biggest, most daunting problems.

Last year, I proclaimed that Baltimore was Back. And the people of this city prove me right every day.

Now, we must stay the course and see this effort through.

It will be hard, it will be long, but it will be worth it to build a Baltimore that works for every single Baltimorean.

Join me in this fight for the future of our city and show the world how beautiful Baltimore can be!

God Bless Baltimore — the greatest city in America!

And God Bless You!