



Mayor Michelle Wu
State of the City Address • January 9, 2024
As Prepared for Delivery

Good evening, Boston!

I want to thank our hosts at the MGM Music Hall—the Red Sox and Fenway Music Group—and all of tonight’s interpreters for helping us reach our residents in eight languages.

Governor Healey and constitutional officers; Council President Louijeune and City Councilors, Chair Robinson and the Boston School Committee; State Representatives, Senators, and county officials: Thank you for your partnership.

To all our residents, across every neighborhood: Thank you for the opportunity—and honor—of serving you.

I wouldn’t be here without my family: Conor, Blaise, and Cass...I love you.

And our City wouldn’t be here without our City workers and the labor partners that represent them: It’s a gift to serve alongside you everyday.

Three weeks ago, I was walking down Talbot Ave in a sea of celebration: trolleys and buses and a flatbed truck packed with young athletes flashing rings and hoisting trophies; neighbors cheering from windows and balconies; fans leaping from barbershop chairs to join us in the street. All to celebrate Boston’s first ever Pop Warner national champions: the Boston Lady Raiders cheer squad...and the Dorchester Elite Eagles Youth Football team.

And after the parade, and the pep rally at the Boys & Girls Club, and the last slices of pizza, I noticed Terry Cousins—city worker by day, “Coach Beefy” every weekend—sitting by himself, and not even his big sunglasses could hide the tears running down his face.

This was 19 years in the making, he said. They’d gone down to Florida 18 times before. Four times, they made it to the finals. They lost in overtime and double-overtime. But they never stopped going, refused to give up.

And then, they made history. And as we marched through Dorchester that day, I saw in the eyes of every proud coach, and teammate, and day-one supporter—the spirit that burns bright in every corner of Boston.

The grit, & courage, and deep sense of community that drives us to overcome the impossible—for the people we love and the place we call home.

It's that spirit that the world needs most right now, when so much feels impossible: peace and safety, prosperity and stability; pride in our democracy, and hope for a tomorrow with a little more light.

The world needs the proof that Boston provides: That we can create a community where every family finds joy and belonging—that we can kindle a brighter future if we refuse to give up.

So every day, in Boston, we go to work chipping away at the challenges that stand in our way. And every day, our progress invites the world to join us in breaking new ground.

As cities everywhere grapple with the opioid crisis and homelessness, Boston has refused to give up on health and stability, person by person. Our teams built relationships at Mass and Cass, and added more beds and services citywide. With unprecedented coordination, we delivered unprecedented results: Today the encampments are gone, and hundreds of people are housed and on the path to recovery. Thank you to Boston Healthcare for the Homeless, Boston Medical Center, DMH, Eliot, Newmarket BID, Pine Street Inn, Victory Programs, and all our partners for the progress we've made and the progress to come.

Across the country, cities look to Boston as the leading light on community safety. Two years ago, our officers and community members drove gun violence down to the lowest level on record. Last year, we did it again and set a new low, and we refuse to give up on ending violence everywhere in our city. We're investing in trauma supports, healing, and a community-driven safety plan with service providers, faith leaders, and residents.

And we negotiated a police contract unlike any other: opening up paid detail opportunities, investing in officer education, and ending arbitration as a way to overturn discipline for the most serious offenses. In ratifying this contract, our officers voted overwhelmingly to hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability, and set a national precedent for community policing.

Last year, BPD took more than 800 guns off the street, our firefighters extinguished more than 300 building fires, and Boston EMS responded to over 130,000 emergency calls. We graduated the most diverse classes of police recruits and cadets in Boston's history, launched the first Boston EMS cadet program in two decades, and welcomed our first ever class of Boston Fire cadets. Would all our cadets please stand? Thank you, and thank you to all our first responders for your service to the people of Boston.

Across the globe, Boston is the leader in the industries that will fuel our future: life sciences and healthcare, climate tech and innovation—from Vertex’s recent breakthrough on non-opioid pain medication, to ArkeaBio’s cutting-edge solutions to reduce methane emissions. Last year, we launched a \$10 million partnership to connect our residents with careers in the life sciences and diversify and strengthen the industry. And a group of CEOs has come together with the City to focus on our workforce—how we retain and attract talent, and deepen collaborations between business and government. Thank you to Boston’s business community for leading the way nationally, and partnering to make a difference right here at home.

Time and again, we have proven the future is ours to shape. And day by day, we’re following through on Boston’s promise to be a green and growing city for everyone. Last year, I promised to ban fossil fuels in new City buildings, and we did: Already, two new community centers and two libraries in progress will be fossil fuel free. And this year, we will introduce zero net carbon zoning to make Boston the greenest city in the country. I’m also proud to announce that, with National Grid, we will launch Boston’s first-ever networked geothermal system—delivering clean energy for heating and cooling to hundreds of families in the Franklin Field community.

Last year, I promised Boston would do more to use City contracting to build wealth in our communities, and we did: more than doubling the amount awarded to businesses owned by people of color and Boston-based companies. We are one of the only cities in the nation with a sheltered markets program to address racial disparities in contracting. And we’re taking it further with a \$9 million investment to build local businesses’ capacity to compete for more and bigger contracts.

Last year, I promised to keep fighting for Boston to have a seat on the MBTA Board, and in August, the Legislature and Governor delivered. Thank you to our state partners, and to Boston’s new board representative, Mary Skelton Roberts. To tackle traffic, we’re updating curb regulations and using machine learning to detect when and where congestion is worst, then optimize signals to unclog key corridors.

Last year, I promised major changes to the Boston Planning and Development Agency. And here, too, we’re delivering: we restructured the BPDA to elevate planning and design, began modernizing development review, and launched the first comprehensive rezoning in decades. Our Squares & Streets planning kicks off next month, and in July we’ll transition BPDA staff to the City—restoring planning as a core function of City government.

Planning for a more affordable, equitable, and resilient future will help us weather the challenges that cities everywhere are facing—emptier downtowns, unpredictable

commutes, and housing prices that are squeezing families out. We launched an office-to-residential conversion program that has already attracted proposals to turn eight downtown buildings into housing. And we filled vacant storefronts with 24 local businesses—from BoldSkin Babe to Flourish & Foundry—creating 300 new jobs.

We're investing more in the arts than ever before—public art, performing arts, and events to bring communities together in person. In the months ahead, there will be more we must do together—to stay ahead of the curve.

And our City teams will keep working to serve every community. Last year: For drivers, we filled more than 7,000 potholes. For divers, we opened newly renovated pools in East Boston and Dorchester, with seven more on the way. For riders, we added e-bikes to Bluebikes. And for hiders—and seekers—we cut the ribbon on eight new playgrounds and parks. For union trades, we passed a construction safety ordinance. And for new unions made, we became the first Massachusetts City to make marriage licenses gender-inclusive. For readers, we extended hours at 21 branch libraries and for speeders, we built more than 300 new speed humps on neighborhood streets. And, for the ninth year in a row, our financial health earned us a triple-A bond rating, giving us the best possible rates to complete City projects—from the Curley Community Center to the Faneuil library. This year, we'll break ground on a new Boston EMS ambulance station in the Seaport, and cut the ribbon on the new Engine 17 firehouse on Meetinghouse Hill.

It is thanks to the people of Boston that tonight I can say: The State of our City is strong. Not because the challenges that remain are simple or small. But because they're big, and they matter, and we are rising to meet them. And that starts with housing, because home is the place where everything starts.

Last year, we permitted the highest ratio of affordable housing in over a decade, and approved nearly 7,400 housing units for future development.

In June, I joined Giselle Jimenez as she sat down in front of the most important stack of papers in her life. As a single mom raised by a single mom in the Mary Ellen McCormack development, she told me it had always been her dream to have a house of her own. Her two boys crowded in close as she signed the closing documents to move from public housing to a beautiful home in Hyde Park with a yard for them to run around in. Congratulations to all our first-time homebuyers here tonight.

In October, I stood in what used to be an unfinished basement in Roxbury, admiring every thoughtful detail of a brand new Accessory Dwelling Unit Mark Kennedy built for his 89-year-old mom, Peggy. He'd watched her struggle up the stairs of her building too

many times, so he worked with the City to build her a new home on the ground floor of his own. Ms. Peggy, I'm so glad you have a beautiful new space close to your loving son. To help more multigenerational families like Mark's, this year we will eliminate barriers for residents to build ADUs citywide, and support local contractors in getting them built.

From Chinatown to West Roxbury, public housing makes it possible for so many of our seniors, and veterans, and residents with disabilities to stay in our city, and for so many of our young people to grow up here—including two of our newest City Councilors. I'm excited to announce that this year, we will identify locations for nearly 3,000 new public housing units to build over the next decade—and the federal government will provide more than \$100 million a year to maintain them.

Across our city, too many families are getting displaced when their apartment buildings are scooped up by private investors. So we're launching a fund to make these buildings permanently affordable—doubling down on our success last year keeping 114 families in their homes in East Boston. This year, we'll deploy the fund to protect 400 more families citywide.

But as a mom—and a BPS parent—I know that to truly be the best city for every family, we have to give our young people the world: in the classroom, in community, in every corner of our city.

Boston is the birthplace of public education—founded on the belief that knowledge belongs to everyone. But we have yet to deliver on that vision. While this year marks five decades since a federal court ordered our schools desegregated, the reality is that for generations before, Black families had already been fighting for BPS to serve every student. In too many of our neighborhoods, the disinvestment they fought persists to this day, deepened by the transitions and disruptions of the last decade.

But, tonight, I can say that, under the leadership of Superintendent Mary Skipper, BPS is in its strongest position to deliver on the vision of families and activists who refused to give up: to make Boston Public Schools the first choice for every family in Boston, with world-class spaces for learning and the best education on earth.

After decades of underfunding, we're building and renovating schools to reflect our students' aspirations: state-of-the-art science labs, performing arts spaces, locker rooms befitting the City of Champions. Today, ten major BPS capital projects are underway—as many as were built in the last 40 years, combined.

And, thanks to a \$20 million grant from the EPA—we will be adding 50 electric school buses to more than double our fleet. Thank you to EPA Regional Administrator David

Cash, and the BPS Transportation team for helping us deliver healthier commutes for our students and bus drivers.

Beyond buildings and buses, the highest quality education begins at birth. Every year, cities around the country visit Boston to study how we support our littlest learners: We hire highly-qualified educators, focus on continuous coaching and family engagement; and use evidence-based instruction rooted in play. This school year, we expanded Universal Pre-K to 390 more families, and funded certifications for 430 new early educators. And, this spring, we will launch a one-stop-shop to make it easier for families to find and enroll in childcare.

Districtwide, we have a unified academic focus on equitable literacy, grounded in the science of reading, and applied across every subject. We've added reading specialists and literacy coaches, and trained educators on new materials reflecting our students' cultures and languages...And the results speak for themselves: Bucking trends nationwide—here in Boston, chronic absenteeism is on the decline, and the students benefiting from our new curriculum are meeting milestones that set them up for success.

Across the country, Boston is known for providing year-round education and opportunity for our teens. Last year, we set a goal of connecting 7,000 young people with paid summer jobs—instead, we hired nearly 10,000. This year, we'll expand "learn-and-earn" jobs that pay students to take college courses over the summer...and we'll guarantee a summer job to every BPS student who wants one.

In our high schools, we're delivering on our mission to bring early college and career-connected learning to every student: Bunker Hill Community College is expanding early college pathways at Charlestown High School to the entire student body. Roxbury Community College will launch the first early-college incubator for multilingual students at English High, the Margarita Muñiz, and BINCA. And Mass General Brigham will partner with the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers on transformational career-connected learning.

Tonight, I'm also excited to announce that UMass Boston has signed an agreement with BPS to make the BCLA-McCormack High School our district's first University-Assisted Community Hub School.

Together, we'll give our high school students direct access to college coursework and resources, partner educators from both institutions, and create a seamless pathway into UMass Boston for our graduates as we renovate a state-of-the-art high school campus embedded in the Columbia Point community. Thank you to BCLA-McCormack

school leader Ondrea Johnston, Chancellor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, and both of their teams.

Our work to serve young people and families extends far beyond the walls of our schools. Last year, alongside our partners, we helped 500 students learn to play an instrument, provided more than 1,000 swim lessons, and taught more than 500 young people how to ride a bike.

And, last summer, Boston scored a huge goal: landing the National Women's Soccer League's newest franchise in 2026. With our partners at Boston Unity Soccer Group, we're excited to renovate the historic White Stadium at Franklin Park into the first sports venue in the country that will co-house a pro sports team and a public school athletics program. Our students will have a world-class grass field, eight-lane track, brand new locker rooms, and conditioning and study spaces to call home. We'll also create a new booster fund for BPS athletics to cover expenses for uniforms, extra equipment, and dedicated transportation.

But Franklin Park is more than a home for Boston's next generation of champions: For my family and many others, there is no more magical place in the city, with its historic stone bridges; wooded trails; and beloved community spaces. But our biggest park has suffered from decades of disinvestment. This year, we will act on recommendations from the Franklin Park Coalition and community members to begin restoring Franklin Park to its fullest potential. We will hire a park administrator and six new maintenance staff, bringing dedicated park staffing to the highest level in over 50 years. And we will begin the community process to reimagine and invest in a home for the Elma Lewis Playhouse.

Every young person deserves to grow up in a city with wide open spaces that coax our legs into running—that remind us to breathe deep and look up at the sky. Many of the places that spark wonder, curiosity, and joy don't have walls. But some of them do.

So I want to tell you one last story, about a mom and her daughter.

The mother is still new to this country—still adjusting to the grocery stores that are overwhelmingly bright and impossibly big, the language that tumbles fast and sure from the mouths of the strangers around her, full of sharp turns her tongue cannot make. She doesn't have much money, and ends don't always meet for her and her husband, and their growing toddler.

But on this day, none of that matters, because it's a Tuesday—and on Tuesdays, the big art museum downtown has free admission. So she's there with her little girl, in a little pink stroller, staring up at a painting of a cliff full of wildflowers. And, in this moment,

this mom with no money and no words in this language feels like the best mom on earth because she has given her daughter the world for a day.

She tells the story to her daughter as she grows: “弭弭, 你不記得 小時候陪著媽媽一起看畫, 每個禮拜二跟媽媽在一起。” And her daughter smiles at her mom’s love and her pride, that fills every space and makes it feel like home.

Tonight her daughter gets to announce a new program for kids all across Boston, to feel at home in the places that show them the world. Starting in February, on the first and second Sundays of each month, BPS students and their families will get free admission at the Museum of Fine Arts, the Institute of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Science, the Boston Children’s Museum, the New England Aquarium, and the Franklin Park Zoo.

Thank you to each of these treasured institutions for all that you mean to our city, and for working with us to extend your legacy of making Boston a true home for young people and families.

Because “home” is so much more than a house—though it’s a good start: Add a park down the street for kids to run around in...and a unit below so grandma can live close. Make it a place you can put down roots, knowing they’ll blossom. Surround it with schools that inspire and connect. Open the doors wide to give your community the world. When your neighbors win big, throw a parade.

Home is all the little points of light that give tomorrow its glow. It’s the place—and the people—you refuse to give up on. Thank you, to all of you, for making Boston our home. God Bless the City—and people—of Boston.

###