



2023 MAYOR'S BUDGET MESSAGE

Madam Chair and members of City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Article 10, Section 10.2 and 10.3 of the Charter of the City of Huntington, West Virginia, I hereby present to you the proposed budget and an accompanying budget message for Fiscal Year 2024.

In my first Budget Message in 2013, I opened my remarks with the following introductory comment: "The budget prepared for your consideration is designed with three underlying objectives - to create an environment that fosters and encourages investment in our City; to provide services that seek to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods; and, through these efforts, to establish the greatest opportunity for job creation for our citizens." This statement has been our standard for the past 10 years.

This is my 11th Budget Message. I have sought to keep my messages consistently optimistic, consistently visionary and consistently realistic. The challenge has been to lift our expectations to realize that our goals should never be artificially low but exponentially high.

The budget that is prepared for Fiscal Year 2024 is familiar. Our budgetary challenges have evolved during the past 10 years. In recent years, we were able to turn the corner from budgetary austerity and create a healthy budget that has consistent revenue projections and expenditure discipline. I said in our early years of budget challenges that we did not have a revenue problem. We had an expense problem. The fiscal discipline that we instilled in our departmental budgets has enabled us to lead the state in tax reductions, revenue increases, record infrastructure investment and appropriations to help the marginalized and artistic expression.

Our priorities have not changed. We will not be changing course at this stage. We have no intention to mess with success. Directly stated, we intend to finish what we started.

We are benefiting from our efforts and from a rebounding economy. Our unemployment rate of 3% is less than half of the 6.6% was in January of 2013. The unemployment rate is lower than any time since 1969.

During the early days of my administration, I was quoted as saying, "Excellence must be created by design and not happenstance." Those words have proven to be a powerful indicator of our actions this past decade. Our efforts have been intentional and calculated. The results reflect an effort that sought significant citizen involvement. It is difficult to fathom the enormous number of capital projects that we have embarked upon. However, when we reconstruct how we managed to identify the projects, devise the strategy to implement the ideas bring to the table all the people who were involved, it is no wonder that we have more activity present in our city than we have had in more than five decades.



In creating our plans for a transformed economy, we kept a few key principles in mind. We view our endeavors through a wide lens. We seek to never be insular in our perspective. We embrace a philosophy of regional prosperity. We never make decisions based on what is only good for a singular neighborhood or only good for our city and residents. We always approach our decisions with an eye to the impact on the Tri-State, the state of West Virginia and the Appalachian region. We operate from the perspective that if we find ways to identify solutions that are unique to our city, state and region, we will become a leader that can be transformative to our nation.

We confidently call this “the Huntington way” to do things.

Secondly, we never view ourselves through a prism as being a small town with limited opportunities. We know that as a small community, we have an advantage over the largest cities in the nation. When approaching an issue, we can identify faster what works, quicker what doesn’t and sooner how to fix it. This is why we continue to serve as the home for pilot projects establishing innovative solutions.

Lastly, our success rests in creating collaborative partnerships that draw upon a multitude of perspectives. Communication, collaboration, partnerships and trust yield hope as an outcome, never as a tactic.

As we proceeded to assemble an aggressive program of innovation and immense infrastructure development, we hosted 86 public meetings and received input from 2,970 individuals from every neighborhood in the city. Our efforts were intended to form an innovative plan creating real results with priorities that pointed to solutions creating regional prosperity for our proposal for the “America’s Best Communities” competition. Our strategy involved 70 public meetings with more than 2,100 individuals participating. The brilliant wisdom of how the ABC competition was constructed required that the plan submitted by the participating community was not to be a “mayor’s plan” or a “chamber of commerce plan.” It had to be born of the community. Our winning proposal that garnered such an overwhelmingly positive response by the ABC judges was a transformative plan that was indeed born of the community. All told, we have three citizen-based community development, nonprofit organizations that have been assembled by residents of Fairfield (Fairfield CDC), Highlawn (Highlawn Alliance) and West End (RenewAll).

We have 67 projects currently being developed or in the planning stages by the employees of the City of Huntington totaling \$514.7 million. These projects alone have either already been completed or will be completed in the next 2 to 5 years. **(See attachment)**

The projects are broken down into the following categories:

- City-owned facilities (7)
- Programs advancing quality of life (9)



- Transportation (13)
- Economic development (8)
- Sewer/Storm water (27)
- Beautification (3)

These projects are funded through federal and state partnerships, private funding and, in part, through our capital improvements budget.

As I stated earlier, our efforts have been guided by a compass that stresses regional collaboration and cooperation. Nothing underscores this mindset more than the ACT Now Coalition, of which we are an active member. The ACT Now Coalition was one of 21 winners of the Biden Administration's U.S. Economic Development Administration Build Back Better Regional Challenge. Projects in Southern West Virginia will receive \$62.8 million as a result, \$15.7 million of which will be awarded to projects in Huntington.

Our partners in the ACT Now Coalition include Coalfield Development Corp., Marshall University, West Virginia University, Mountwest Community and Technical College, the City of Charleston and the City of Logan, among others.

The Highlawn area's ACF site, acquired by the Huntington Municipal Development Authority, will receive \$8.2 million to set up a new manufacturing hub. The first anchor tenant of the H-BIZ manufacturing hub will be a new Welding & Robotics Technology Training Center. Marshall University's Robert C. Byrd Institute (RCBI) will oversee the Training Center in partnership with Mountwest Community and Technical College (MCTC). RCBI will utilize robotic welding technology at this new Training Center and integrate it into its advanced welding program.

In addition, Coalfield Development Corp., a nonprofit organization headquartered in Wayne that focuses on rebuilding the Appalachian economy from the ground up, will receive \$7.5 million to partner with Solar Holler and transform the former Black Diamond factory in Huntington's Westmoreland neighborhood into a new "Mine the Sun" solar training and logistics center.

The new \$25 million Marshall baseball stadium also is being constructed on part of the ACF site. The City of Huntington and HMDA provided the initial \$8 million seed capital for the baseball stadium to be built. Construction began this winter, and the baseball stadium is expected to be open for competition in the spring of 2024.

The principal gateway into the City of Huntington is the Hal Greer Boulevard Corridor. Hal Greer Boulevard is a busy commercial corridor for traffic leading to Cabell Huntington Hospital, Marshall University and downtown. The market demand for development along the corridor is, to say the least, dynamic. Northcott Court's development and a grocery store with additional commercial space coupled with Marshall University and Cabell Huntington Hospital will ensure that Hal Greer



Boulevard is the most transformative highway in the city within the next five years. Discussion of the redesign of the Hal Greer Boulevard Corridor began in 2013. \$17.9 million has been secured for phases 1 and 2 of the project from Washington Boulevard to 3rd Avenue. Phase 3 from Washington Boulevard to Kinetic Park will cost an additional \$8 million. We are in active discussions for grant support on that phase of the project. The redesign is intended to make the corridor brighter with more lighting and pedestrian safety features.

Downtown Huntington has become the most dynamic, eclectic downtown area in at least a 100-mile radius. Pullman Square is assured to have local control with HMDA purchasing controlling interest of the development. New investment to upgrade the Mountain Health Arena adds an additional draw to the downtown area. There also is the future redesign of the downtown streetscape. This \$12.1 million streetscape, coupled with a \$2 million replacement of the antiquated brown, “shoe box” lights in the downtown will complete the makeover of our downtown area.

The investment that will create the greatest opportunity for every person and business in the city is our broadband deployment plan. Our unique design is to deploy fiber so every household and business in the city will have access to high-speed broadband. We have no desire to be in the internet business. There are many carriers that are more than capable of providing the service. Our intention is to deploy 190 miles of fiber to every home and business in the city. Each person or business can select among the carriers that choose to compete for the business of our residents and businesses. The cost of the total project to lay the fiber is projected to cost \$15.9 million. We have committed \$7 million of ARPA funding to set the stage for our development.

In addition, we are submitting a Smart Cities grant application to be utilized for public and environmental safety. We are pursuing a \$1 million grant to begin our design of Smart Cities initiatives.

These are projects that just scratch the surface of all that is being pursued and implemented. The beginning stages of all these projects began 10 years ago. What is being acted upon now are projects that are in the implementation stage. These projects are strategic endeavors intended to prepare our city to compete in the world marketplace.

Our competition is not the city down the river. Our competition is the largest cities in the world. Fortunately, we have competed with those cities and have found that we can stand shoulder to shoulder with all of them. We have that capacity in our reach.

As others become aware of the breadth of activity in our city, it is no wonder that Huntington is developing a reputation as a city of solutions.



The budget itself remains conservative in our revenue projections and cautious in our spending. City Council earlier this fiscal year authorized the approval of three contracts with our employee bargaining units. As a result, we stand more prepared to minimize attrition, maximize our efforts in recruitment and provide for fairness to all of our employees.

The Huntington Police Department will be the highest-paid law enforcement agency in the state. The Huntington Fire Department is eliminating compression of salary classifications in the rank structure, thereby ensuring our younger firefighters have incentive to proceed through the ranks.

The AFSCME contract for our Public Works employees and other departmental administrative personnel will be compensated at a minimum of \$15 per hour.

Our administrative and professional employees will receive the same pay increases as detailed in the AFSCME bargaining agreement.

Every employee is receiving a pay increase. When I became mayor in 2013, city employees had gone six years without an increase in compensation. With the most recent bargaining unit agreements, our employees' compensation has increased by more than 40% since I was elected mayor. In turn, we have strengthened our health care benefits and have saved our public safety pensions. We have brought peace of mind to all fire and police pensioners that their pensions are protected going forward.

As I have detailed here, we are investing our capital to lift our community and to establish a foundation of regional prosperity. Our development projects in our neighborhoods and downtown is establishing a foundation that creates opportunity for every person in Huntington.

Last year I enumerated, however, that we should temper our tendency to be self-congratulatory for our advances. More than one-third of our population still lives at or below the federal poverty line. An additional 20% of our population lives with limited assets paycheck to paycheck. They are one paycheck away from homelessness. We have seen an exponential growth of individuals who are unsheltered. I am proud of our efforts to support the Facing Hunger Food Bank by donating to date \$500,000.

Our city has been recognized over the years for the social safety net that was established under the Nelson Administration in the late 1980s. Harmony House, the Coalition for the Homeless and the City Mission have been examples that other communities have looked to for a compassionate city. The 1980s era of services, however, are not sufficient for the 21st century challenges facing Huntington or any city, town or village in America.

In the past years, the challenges of homelessness, mental illness and addiction have strained our efforts to respond. Make no mistake, the challenges of homelessness, mental health and addiction



are national issues. Certainly, the issues are paramount in every community in West Virginia. I have constant conversations with mayors and city managers throughout our state and nation.

Three things are certain. First, every locality must organize social welfare agencies, public health entities, medical providers, faith organizations and property owners to the extent they have those entities in their community. Second, cities, towns and villages must coordinate their efforts and never seek to transfer their homeless, mental health or addiction issues to other communities unless the transfer is a result of collaboration between the communities. Third, local governments cannot address this alone. Local governments have proven that they have the capability to create innovative solutions. However, local governments do not have the capacity. State government must become a trusted partner in addressing these issues.

Presently, the most recent data that we have available indicates that in February 2022, the number of unsheltered was 5 times more than we had in 2013 and 3 ½ times as many who were unsheltered in 2018.

Jan Rader and the Mayor's Council on Public Health and Drug Control Policy have been identifying partnership opportunities and determining solutions. I have met with Mayor Goodwin of Charleston and her team. Jan Rader has had several meetings with the Charleston team as well. We have visited each other's operations. I believe we collectively have an opportunity to utilize our community's institutional resources to provide housing, create a revised continuum of care for those with mental illness and provide appropriate treatment for those fighting addiction.

We must be clear. We intend to provide compassionate accountability. Yes, we will be compassionate, but we also intend to hold individuals accountable. It is our collective intent to ensure that adequate shelter is available. However, it is never appropriate for individuals to choose to make their shelter the stoop of the front door of an office building, the drive through areas of a bank or the carport of a private residence. Neither is it acceptable to relieve one's self or defecate in the alleys of our city. We will hold people of all social strata accountable.

The Huntington Police Department has established a Crisis Intervention Team/Mobile Crisis Unit comprised of officers who are receiving mental health first aid training. A mental health liaison has been hired within HPD. Her responsibility is to provide training to our officers and build an action-oriented unit to respond to calls that carry the potential of a mental health crisis. The Crisis Intervention Team/Mobile Crisis Unit will utilize any trained officers, the HPD Mental Health Liaison and any other available mental health professionals from our partnering agencies. The team will begin "jumping calls" where 911 calls have the potential to involve crises as well as following up with citizens in need.



To date, the Mental Health Liaison has provided 76 interventions and warm hand-offs to people in need.

Addiction continues to be a challenge for our area. Fortunately, our city has responded in a manner that continues to receive inquiries from across the nation. Unfortunately, we did suffer a setback when our opioid litigation received a ruling by the presiding federal judge that our legal team did not meet the standard of proof that the opioid distributors had fueled the opioid crisis in our community. We are appealing that ruling and feel confident in our ability to prevail. In the meantime, we continue to address issues facing our community because of the rampant level of addiction that continues to plague our city.

Overdose deaths continues to be an ongoing concern. According to Dr. Michael Kilkenny, the medical director of the Cabell Huntington Health Department, "OD deaths in Cabell County peaked in 2017, then declined 40% by 2019. During COVID, OD deaths rose, but not back to the level of 2017. 2022 OD death data is not available at the county level at this time."

Our overdoses in Cabell County reduced by 14.64% last year. Overdoses have reduced by over 50% since the high in 2017. The COVID pandemic reversed the two-year trend of overdoses.

Non-Fatal Overdose EMS Suspected Data for Cabell County

2017	1,831
2018	854
2019	663
2020	980
2021	1,059
2022	904

* 14.64% decrease in non-fatal overdoses in Cabell County from 2021 to 2022

One particular concern has been the overwhelming development of unlicensed and unregistered sober-living facilities. Our position is clear. Any structure – business or residential – in the city limits of Huntington must pass inspection to assure the structure meets our building, fire, and safety codes. Any building being occupied for residential use or for the operation of a business must have a certificate of occupancy. If the property is a rental property, whether it be a business or residential, must also have a business license.

These details are necessary for the life and safety of those who enter the premises. We will and do support sober-living facilities that are credible and are not an easy shakedown opportunity for those who are the most marginalized in our community. We will stand to protect those individuals



seeking treatment and refuse to allow any entity that is taking advantage of these souls to operate within the boundaries of our city.

We have been investing in capital equipment in all our departments and we will continue that effort again in the coming year's budget.

HPD continues to control crime at a level that is well below the spike that developed in 2017.

- The FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) reports that our property crime rate is the lowest since 1985.
- Reported violent crimes are lower than in 1985 and the lowest since 2013.
- Offenses in 2021 and 2022 were the lowest since 2010.

HFD will be completing two new fire stations within the coming year.

- The Mayor Joseph L. Williams Jr. Fire Station in the Fairfield neighborhood is expected to be completed and open on time in June and is under budget.
- The Westmoreland Fire Station is expected to begin construction in the late summer and completed in the fall of 2024.

Our priorities for the Huntington Fire Department remain consistent. Staffing is one of our primary objectives. As we seek to make our compensation more competitive, we also recognize that the danger our firefighters face every moment of every day demands that we provide the equipment, training and varied apparatuses that enable the staff of HFD to safely and effectively protect the residents and visitors of our city and property.

A top priority is and always will be the safety of our firefighters. Included in that priority is ensuring we are fully staffed to enable necessary staff deployment so our firefighters can continue to effectively and safely protect our residents and neighborhoods. Our firefighters responded to nearly 4,000 calls in 2022. Of those calls, 56% were responding to fires, hazardous non-fire conditions, medical emergencies and good intent calls. We will continue to equip and compensate our firefighters in a manner that they can safely protect life and property and, just as important, to go home safely at the end of their shift.

The Compass Program continues to provide tailored wellness support to promote physical and mental wellness for our firefighters and police officers. Originally funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies as one of nine national winners of the 2018 Mayor's Challenge, the city continues to provide an annual appropriation. Additional private funding is provided by several corporate and philanthropic organizations. This program was formed to create help for the helpers of our community. The program is structured to provide assistance to first responders to develop self-care training and mental health resources for overcoming burnout that affects personal, professional and community well-being.



The Public Works Department will continue the implementation of the 10-year paving program where each street in the city will be paved and/or sealed to lengthen the useful life of the paving.

Public Works also reports that the recycling program that began last fall has already demonstrated a significant effect on our garbage tonnage. Rumpke reports the following tonnage since the program's inception this fall:

Year	Month	Tons
2022	October	21.07
2022	November	23.41
2022	December	22.19
2023	January	26.32

While the Water Quality Board, the Sanitary Board and Storm Water Utility are not part of the General Fund, the activities of these entities certainly gain the full attention of the citizens of the city.

The Sanitary Board rate increase authorized by City Council last year has the leadership of the Water Quality Board actively meeting with our state and federal office holders as well as the leadership of several state and federal agencies to line up funding for the projects set forth in the rate increase request. The \$200-plus million in approved projects will be the largest local infrastructure project in the history of the state of West Virginia.

The Huntington Storm Water Utility (HSU) has begun to receive increased ratings of our system.

The HSU has received a marginally acceptable rating from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the downtown levee and floodwall system. This is the same rating the Guyandotte system received. This rating has allowed HSU to apply for the downtown levee/floodwall system to be accredited through FEMA and has sent in the documentation for accreditation to FEMA. We hope to hear back from FEMA sometime this summer. The downtown levee/floodwall system was never accredited when FEMA started this process after Hurricane Katrina (2005), so this is a huge step forward. The accreditation affirms that the floodplain area within the city is protected by the levee/floodwall. The downtown levee/floodwall is also reinstated into the Corps of Engineers' PL 84-99 Program now that the stabilization project at 11th street is complete and has a marginally-acceptable rating during its annual inspection.

The Guyandotte levee/floodwall system was accredited by FEMA back in 2018. This was after HSU crews completed all of the required operations and maintenance requirements outlined in the city's 1944 agreement with the Corps of Engineers (first time in 75 years that Huntington has



completed all items since taking ownership of the levee/floodwall system in 1944). The Guyandotte system also was placed back into the Corps of Engineers' PL 84-99 Program.

Under PL 84-99, the Corps of Engineers can provide both emergency technical and direct assistance in response to flooding and coastal storms. The assistance must be requested by the state, and it must be supplemental to state and local actions including resources and capabilities and National Guard assets.

As I stated at the outset, our daily general fund budget is constructed to create an environment that fosters and encourages investment in our City, to provide services that seek to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods and, through these efforts, to establish the greatest opportunity for job creation for our citizens.

Our daily efforts and our budget that funds those efforts are intentional.

We have a vision of creating a meaningful, measurable track record of success in developing a plan of action toward a new direction, a future of unbridled opportunity, where Huntington is seen as the example of the gateway to Appalachia at the dawn of the digital age. This is the Huntington Way.