



Office of Mayor Peter Schwartzman

## State of the City 2024

(delivered on 11/25/2024 at the Chamber of Commerce's Thanksgiving Luncheon)

Hello everyone. This is the fourth year I have stood before you; actually, only the third as I did one of these via a video recording. I feel very privileged to stand before you. What an amazing group. Not only because of all the dignitaries that are present but all of you. I have a lot of respect for everyone in this room for the wonderful work you do to make Galesburg the great city that it is.

I am here to give the State of the City.

So, let's first identify the areas of importance that I will discuss:

1. Safety
2. Finances
3. Jobs
4. Housing
5. Transportation
6. Livability

Let me now provide snapshot of the work done in these areas this year and in next year as well.

Let's start with our STRATEGIC PLAN that we conducted early this year and that many of you were involved with...it will be "received" by the council before the year is out and we will use it to make key investments to our future. I wanted to start here as it is a very important step in our process.

1. Next, we have safety, a major priority of mine and many others in our community: I am very happy to report that we have filled our police force. This is a huge achievement. We were recently short nine officers. But today, we are fully staffed. In addition, the diversity of our force reflects the demographics of our community, which was a strategic goal from our past strategic plan—this is a win for all of us

In 2024, we also had three additional fire fighters, the first addition of firefighters in the past 42 years. We did this not only to improve fire safety but also to enhance the quality of life for our fire fighters. Quality of life issues are very important for all our city employees.



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2. Now let's look at finances, both short and long term.
  - A. You may have heard the City's property tax rate for 2025 is the lowest in the past 11 years. To keep property tax rate from growing is a commitment our Council has set forth.
  - B. However, you may not have heard that the City has been very aggressive in its handling of our pension liabilities. Over the past four years, we have contributed the actuarial recommendations (not the state minimums) to the fire and police pensions; doing so for the next 10-12 years will result in fully funded pensions. This is a huge investment to our financial stability in the future. This is tribute to our excellent finance department and the City Council prioritizing this important initiative.
  - C. On the energy front, I have previously released several press releases outlining how the City has saved residents millions of dollars over the years. Well, we conducted an energy audit this year for little or no cost. This study indicates lots of opportunities for Galesburg to save significant dollars in the future with strategic investments. year...lots of opportunities for savings in the next few years (through strategic investment). And let's not forget that in 2024, we saw tens of millions of dollars of investment in solar energy in Galesburg alone (and many more millions in the county).

3. Next, what is going on in the job front? Well, we saw the greatest job creation event in a few decades with Western Smokehouse establishing its headquarters here. This investment is testament to the strength of our community and I thank all those involved in making this happen.

We have also seen the wonderful Graham Hospital expansions this year.

And, we are investing in our future labor force too through, the vocational training center (where enrollments are way up this year...a fair last month saw over 1000 students attend), skills USA and the CEO Program, all job training supported by the City in connection with its future employees.

We also started a grant program three years ago (which ends this year) to help new small businesses. Over the past three years, we have seen 24 startups (11 of them in the downtown area). You have heard of many of these Taste of Candy, Opie's Bar & Grill, Dame Fine Coffee to name a few. This grant program has been a huge success! We definitely have helped aspiring entrepreneurs make their dreams come true.



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4. Housing: The City had a comprehensive Housing Study performed this year. Its findings were just released and discussed at the last CC meeting--many ideas to move forward with

5. Transportation: A massive transportation study has been completed. Its findings will be discussed preceding at the next Council meeting...opportunities exist to expand our system to the county to bring people here to benefit from all the great things our city has to offer

The City put an additional \$2.5 million extra into road repairs (Losey & South to name a few of the big lifts)...We intend on injecting significant dollars to this endeavor in 2025.

We have also been proactive to obtain new buses...something that has been quite difficult nationwide...but we have new buses coming, and many of them are electric

6. Livability...why do we live in this City, because it is a very livable city with many amenities.

Here is what is new in 2024:

- Our new amazing library opened! Usage is way up!
- I brought about 30 new people to Galesburg this year, they were SO IMPRESSED with this new feature of our City.
- We planted another 100+ new trees this year throughout the city...total over the three years is well over 400! [I heard the next day that we stand at 472!]
- A new frisbee golf course was erected at Lake Storey; Kudos to Councilor Acerra for helping make this happen. If you have tried it out, please do!
- The Civic Arts Center had a major renovation completed this year. What a gem!
- Bunker Links successfully celebrated its 100th year (with record rounds recorded).
- Now, livability is connected to the unhoused as well. We have been working on this challenge for years now (as are communities all over the country). We have made some great progress this year by contributing to the creation of a year round warming shelter, the funding coming from the City and community partners.
- And let's not forget, 2024 will be remembered for this .....(pause) Dunkin'! and Chipotle but DON'T forget about two great new offerings in our fabulous downtown: Smoking Willies and Malewa (African food! which just opened last week)



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So what is coming in 2025?:

- A new park, Cooke Park, \$1 million investment
- A significant pickleball investment
- major loop around LAKE STOREY will be completed! (\$2+ million project!)
- A new and impactful community center
- A new outdoor performance center at the old OT Johnson site across from Park Plaza
- Significant Energy savings (through renewable investments at Water Plant + \$200 million of investment in RE (wind and solar) in Knox County
- Strategic investments based on findings from new housing study
- Improvements to our public transportation system based on transportation study's findings

Why is all of this possible?

Because of you! All of you! Yes, YOU. for providing creative ideas, serving on commissions/committees, and injecting positive energy into our community!  
Thank you!

Lastly, please come out next Thursday, DEC 5th, 6 PM...Public Forum on Mental Health at the public library's community room

Once again thank you for all you do! Be safe during the holidays. Enjoy the early winter! See you in January!

Mayor Peter

*Peter Schwartzman*