

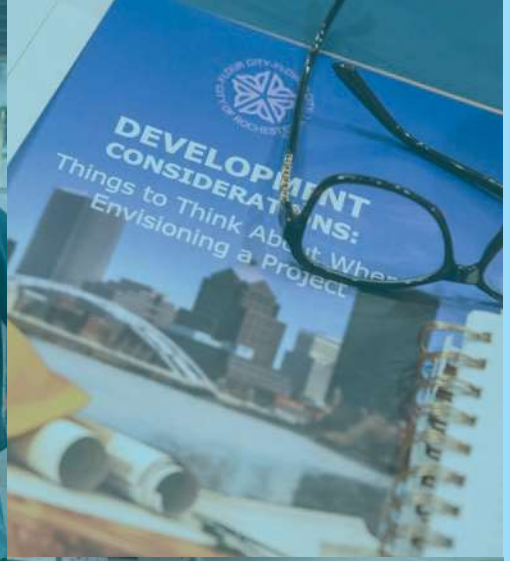


TESTIMONY

Mayor Malik D. Evans • Rochester, New York

*Joint Legislative Hearings
2024-25 New York State Executive Budget Proposal
Local Government Budget
February 6, 2024*





Greetings Chairwoman Krueger and Chairwoman Weinstein; members of the Ways and Means and Finance Committees; and other members of the Senate and Assembly. I am honored to have this opportunity to represent the interests of Rochester's families, its children, its business owners, and all of its stakeholders.

*Last year when I testified before you, I stressed the importance of collaboration. I return this year in the same spirit with our first ever **joint** set of community requests from both the City of Rochester and the County of Monroe. County Executive Adam Bello and I know how crucial our combined efforts are to the success and vitality of our region.*

We are grateful for the support of Governor Kathy Hochul, our New York State legislative delegation, and all of New York's Senators and Assemblymembers. You understand the needs and challenges facing Rochester, Monroe County, and all of the cities and counties across the Empire State. You work tirelessly to provide essential resources that we use to create safe, equitable and prosperous cities so that we can inspire hope and deliver opportunity for everyone.



We are especially thankful for the Governor's commitment in her most recent budget to dedicate \$25 million to support anti-poverty initiatives to address the needs of children and families, and hope to see more direct funding to Rochester in the future. Rochester is home to three of the five poorest zip codes in New York State and out of the top ten poorest zip codes, five are in Rochester. We know how important it is to invest in children and families so our underserved populations can enjoy the same safe and welcoming homes that we all enjoy.



It is necessary to continue our commitment to creating and preserving affordable homes and supportive housing units. For far too many years, disinvestment as the result of redlining have made the American dream of owning a home unreachable for many residents. Knowing that home ownership is the first step to building generational wealth, we used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to “greenline” city neighborhoods with our Buy the Block program, which resulted in the construction of six, new, single-family homes. 18 more are currently under construction and several more are slated to be built.

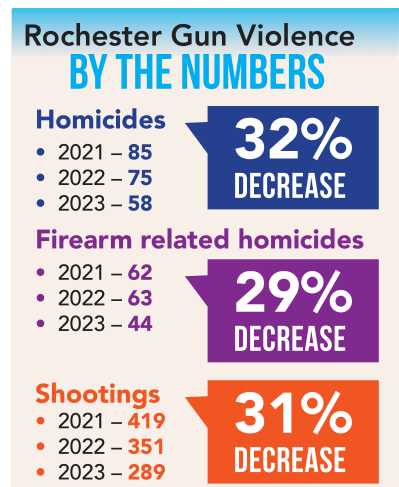
We were also able to use ARPA funds to assist current residents with home improvements to maintain the comfort, appearance, and value of their home. Those funds will soon come to an end as the deadlines for spending ARPA dollars approach.

To keep those efforts going, I ask that you include additional support for homebuyer assistance, home improvement programs, and the development of affordable rental housing.

In addition to our very real financial challenges, Rochester—as you know—is still dealing with unacceptable levels of crime and violence. Our public safety efforts are showing positive results, but we still have far to go. Shootings, firearm-related deaths, and homicides are all down by about 30 percent since 2021, but I am not satisfied. These numbers must fall much lower and at a much faster pace.

The increased support the State provided for the Gun Intervention Violence Elimination (GIVE) program this past year was invaluable to that progress and I look forward to the continuation and expansion of that program in 2024. This important program, which brings our local, State, and Federal law enforcement partners together, has been instrumental in helping to get dangerous criminals and guns off the street and reduce gun violence. We need to continue those efforts.

We must also continue efforts to address the tragedy of the opioid crisis and fentanyl poisoning. We have lost far too many lives and it is crucial that we combine the resources we received from the Opioid Settlement with those dedicated by Governor Hochul to take on this task and keep our residents safe.



We are working hard to build a city that is worth inheriting, and those efforts are working. Constellation Brands will be moving its headquarters Downtown later this year, and other employers are following their lead, creating high-paying jobs for employees and residents who will support our small business sector. These include SunDensity, BandWidth, JCS and Ultraphil. NextCorps, the high-tech incubator in the Sibley Building, is expanding because it's at full capacity with more than 60 startups.

The State's support will help us revitalize our Downtown and reconnect it to our neighborhoods through the Inner Loop North project.



We continue to make good use of our Federal, State, and local dollars towards our ROC the Riverway initiative. However, more funds are required to ensure this bold vision is realized. The Aqueduct Reimagined and Riverfront Promenades projects need \$148 million more to transform crumbling infrastructure into dynamic and welcoming city spaces while celebrating the beauty of our most important natural resource, the Genesee River.

We are committed to creating a sense of place in our Downtown, which wouldn't be possible without the infusion of the State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative funds. Decades-old blight at the corners of Main Street and Clinton Avenue will be eliminated and replaced with new housing units and modern storefronts.

Main Street Commons will create a new, outdoor, walkable space in the heart of Downtown; new housing units will bring the number of Downtown residents to historic, new levels.





We will be asking for additional financial support, \$270 million over 8 to 10 years, for a comprehensive effort to modernize and expand our Downtown Convention Center to attract more visitors and grow the economic vitality of our region.

And, we are very excited to advance the development of the High Falls State Park so that we have a new way for residents and visitors to enjoy the beauty of the Genesee River and the High Falls.

We also seek additional financial support, in the amount of \$35.5 million, for Rochester's Restore the Shore project to remediate the former Vacuum Oil refinery and repair the Western Wall of the Genesee River. For far too long, this portion of southwest Rochester has suffered the effects of environmental and economic injustice from this 15-acre brownfield created by an oil refinery and bulk oil storage that ceased operation in 1935.

The restoration of this area almost 90 years later would create new public amenities, trails and building pads for redevelopment, and deliver equity and justice to this neighborhood.

Post-COVID impacts on construction labor and material costs continue to hamper our ability to provide crucial renovations to many City facilities, especially our historic Edgerton R-Center in the northwest section of our city. This facility, initially built in 1890, is home to the Stardust Ballroom and provides year-round programming for families. This project will require \$54 million.

Our outdated Solid Waste Management Operations Facility needs rehabilitation and our request for state support for this project is \$36 million.



The Executive Budget includes many new and continuing initiatives that we are extremely grateful for:

- Investment in new public safety communications systems, already a joint request from the City and Monroe County;
- The FAST NY Shovel Ready grant program, also a joint request;
- Equipment grants to support response to emergency weather events;
- Increased access to swimming and instruction, an important life skill that should be learned by all of our citizens;
- The creation of an Office of Workforce Development which will be needed as our investments in this area will run out as ARPA dollars expire;
- Continued investment in clean water infrastructure to reduce lead exposure;
- Continued investment in roadway infrastructure through CHIPs, Pave Our Potholes and Extreme Winter Recovery; and
- Expanding access to mental health services.

Rochester will continue to advocate for its fair share of state aid through the Aid and Incentives for Municipalities formula, which, if it were on par with our upstate neighbors, would provide us with an additional \$34 million for much-needed services for residents. We are, however, grateful for what has been proposed, and will work hard to make every dollar count.

In my first State of the City address last year, I quoted First Lady Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson. She said, “Where flowers bloom, so does hope. And hope is the precious, indispensable ingredient, without which the war on poverty can never be won.”

The funding we receive from New York State will leverage the hope that exists in all of our neighborhoods and move Rochester from a poverty mindset to a prosperity mindset.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you and I welcome any questions you may have.



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