

State of the City, Versailles, KY

Remarks presented by Mayor Laura Dake

March 3, 2026

As I reflected on what I was going to write this year, I looked back on what I wrote in 2025, just 10 weeks on the job as mayor. I had said, “I share these remarks with you – elected officials, city staff, and the public – with humility and strong sense of responsibility and care for this special community we call home.” Thirteen months later, I come before you with the same sentiments. It has been a year of learning and growth for me, but the transition from one mayor to another has been relatively seamless, and I believe I’ve managed the transition with dignity, integrity, transparency, and vision. I could not have done this without the support and guidance of our five fantastic department heads, the 120+ employees who serve the City so ably, and the elected members who care about this community so much.

The City is in the midst of what feels like notable change. While this is upsetting for some, many of the changes were set in motion years ago. Commercial and residential growth pose challenges to the City, but ones we are prepared to meet. As we grow, I will do my best to encourage thoughtful growth – growth that retains what is best about our community, our small-town charm – and doesn’t expand our Urban Services Boundary, as I say, “across the parkway.” We must protect our irreplaceable farmland that makes Versailles and Woodford County unique. A gentleman introduced himself to me this past weekend at a basketball tournament at Falling Springs. He told me his family had moved here six months ago from Pennsylvania and how much they loved it here. As people move to Versailles from other places, it’s important to welcome them and encourage them to be part of the community.

More than a few people have asked me which game show I would feature this year. Last year, if you remember, it was *Let’s Make a Deal*, where I analogized four doors – three open and one closed – to describe city opportunities and challenges. I thought briefly about *Jeopardy!* or maybe *The Weakest Link*, but these would be jokes at my expense. In truth, it has been a significant year of progress, and I am proud to deliver a strong, confident, hopeful State of the City.

The City of Versailles is positioned for a great future. Our finances are sound, our residents safe, and our infrastructure robust. Thanks to the downtown merchants, the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Commission and the City’s Events Coordinator, residents and visitors alike are flocking to downtown events and giving Versailles a new vibe as the place to be.

The relationship between the Cities and County is strong. I didn’t appreciate how unusual this is when I was appointed Mayor. Unfortunately, many Kentucky communities experience friction between their governments, but we do not. The relationship between Versailles, Midway and Woodford County leadership is friendly, respectful, and based on the knowledge that we’re all working towards the same goal: a better Woodford County for all. While we have our own budgets and personnel, we share resources when we can.

Communication is important to me, and I'm proud of our efforts in this area. The Communication and Events Coordinator has more than doubled the city's number of Facebook followers in one year to almost 11,000, so many more people are aware of city events and activities. We have a bimonthly city newsletter, and I try to share a little info weekly in "Two Minutes with the Mayor." You can find council meeting agendas and minutes, meeting packets, and meeting videos on the city's website. Meetings are also shown live on Facebook. Communication is internal, too: one department head remarked that communication between department heads is probably better than it ever has been with everyone working well together and respecting each other's opinions and roles.

I am pleased to have established two committees under Executive Order: Walkability and Sustainability. Both committees are comprised mostly of residents, people who are enthusiastic about their committee's focus. The Walkability Committee has broken into three subcommittees as we gear up for a free Bike/Walk Master Plan to be performed by the state's Department of Public Health this summer for the entire USB. The subcommittees – Bike/Walk Master Plan preparation; School Pedestrian Safety; and Downtown Walkability – each meet regularly and their ideas will contribute towards the larger Plan.

The Sustainability Committee is working on ways to decrease the city's environmental footprint by promoting conservation and reducing waste. The committee's first efforts are to produce a graphic that outlines all the recycling options in Woodford County. (For example, did you know there is a place in Versailles where you can take any broken item with a cord to be recycled?) It's also working on ideas for Earth Day. The caring natures, intelligence, and thoughtfulness of the people on these committees make me hopeful for our future, and I invite others who want to get involved in something larger than themselves to reach out.

I continue to be interested in equitable treatment of our neighborhoods, and am proud to be a member of the Housing Authority of Versailles' Board of Commissioners. The Streets Committee (a council standing committee) is looking at traffic on MLK Jr. Blvd using police speed data. Work on Wilson Avenue's sidewalk and stormwater infrastructure should begin soon. I had hoped it would have started by now, but we are waiting for a couple of approvals.

We also need to think more deliberately about how we are going to spend our opioid settlement money. While deaths and overdoses in Woodford County are down, substance misuse remains a problem. A small portion of our opioid funds have gone to NET Recovery, an organization that offers a non-pharmacological device that treats opioid use disorder using neurostimulation to reduce withdrawal symptoms within a few hours, thus making long-term recovery more attainable, but we need to do more with these funds.

Economic Development

Going back to the four doors that I used for illustration in 2025. Door #1 contained the "red convertible," or the flashy prize. This represented economic development. Though Versailles lost a

significant employer in 2025, the city continues to thrive economically, thanks to a diverse base of employers as well as new businesses. Each one of them supports city infrastructure and contributes to our quality of life.

Here is what Versailles has to look forward to In 2026 and beyond related to economic development.

- First, the City is partnering with the County and the Woodford Economic Development Authority to purchase the Yokohama building, which ceased operations last year and laid off more than 250 people. This purchase will allow the City and County to decide what industry goes in there. We are interested in an employer who is a good corporate citizen and will bring high-quality, high-paying jobs to the area. Without a say in the matter, we risk turning the facility into a warehousing or distribution operation with fewer jobs that are typically not high paying.
- As I speak, we are finalizing a lease agreement for the “old Kroger” building at 525 Marsailles Road. Half the space will be developed as a family entertainment complex. The City will be assisting with funding for a roof replacement, but will recoup this investment in total when the building sells in about seven years. In the meantime, the City will be collecting monthly rent payments starting in September. We are excited to give this project to a well-respected developer and builder. The roof replacement is required to be completed by June 30, so expect to see movement soon.
- Expect to see the start of construction at the site of the former Edgewood Farm. The “roundabout to nowhere” (as some have called it!) will be connected to a commercial development to the east. I had hoped to give you the names of both the grocer and home improvement center tonight, but can only say that the home improvement center will most likely be a Lowe’s. In addition to the anchor tenants, there will be numerous outparcels, including a convenience store, restaurants, and a bank. (I do not know what ones.) On the other end of the development near Paynes Mill, the city will build a minimum 360 ft. extension of Paddock Drive into the Edgewood property as well as turn lanes off US 60. The money for this project came from Congressional Community Project Funding. The city is required to build this section of road as part of the Edgewood settlement.
- Economic development includes events – events bring people to town where they spend money – and this past year’s events were ones for the books. The City’s Events and Communications Coordinator, Amanda Wainscott, created or reimagined, marketed and staffed a host of festivities, including ones that are continuing in 2026: the Glow EGGstravaganza, Market Days, Block Parties, the 4th of July Parade, and the end-of-year holiday events. This year, as we celebrate America’s 250th birthday, there will be new events with a special focus on the 4th of July. This fall, we’ll even be hosting a Masquerade Ball with proceeds going to charity!

Public Works, Utilities, Public Safety & City Hall

This had been Door #2 previously. I used a washer/dryer as the prize behind this door, a functional item that most everyone has and that we don't think much about until something goes wrong. This represents the people who take care of our infrastructure: Public Works, Utilities, Public Safety, and City Hall. How these departments are run can make (or break) a city. The hard, day-to-day work of a city requires skill, knowledge, discipline, and – sometimes – intense physical labor. Remember the snow and ice storm we just had? You can thank these people for salting and clearing roads and parking lots; repairing broken water lines in the middle of the night in the freezing cold; answering calls related to car accidents and assisting people who needed to get to critical medical appointments or jobs; and putting out a devastating apartment fire and saving the apartment building next door from the same fate. Versailles is so fortunate to have staff in place who understand their jobs, strive to do the best they can every day, encourage those around them, and love this city.

First, public works. Under the able direction of *Public Works Director* Bart Miller and Assistant Director Dan Knight, city streets and sidewalks, stormwater infrastructure and the city cemeteries are maintained. Accomplishments in 2025 included: fleet upgrades, including a box truck for the chipper and a new vacuum truck; a comprehensive OSHA review; completion of the roundabout at Kroger Way under a very tight deadline; the expansion of available office space at city hall and energy savings in the building; and providing \$90,000 worth of sidewalk improvements. Versailles and Rose Crest Cemeteries were fully updated in GIS, a two-year project with assistance from GIS Director Kenneth Johns. Sidewalk inventory information is now mapped in GIS as well and reflects the status of every sidewalk in the city.

In 2026, Public Works staff will prioritize:

- Evaluating asphalt on every city street and assigning a rating
- Implementing OSHA mandated safety requirements and instilling a culture of safety in employees
- Implementing cemetery infrastructure improvements, particularly on the cemetery house
- Increasing training for employees to benefit the city and provide advancement opportunities
- Building a multi-use path that will begin as a spur off the existing walking path near the corner of Tyrone and Falling Springs Blvd. The path will cross Tyrone, run up Beasley Drive past the Agricultural Extension office and cross again in front of the senior center, promoting safety, accessibility, and connectivity in this busy area
- Replacing street trees downtown and starting work on redoing the sidewalks on S Main between Morgan and Baker Alley and Rose Hill and City National Bank
- Managing the construction and maintenance of new roads at the Edgewood development

A final note to residents: There are roads that need attention in the city, namely Lexington St., North Main, and Frankfort Street. These are state roads, not city streets. The state is in charge of

maintaining these roads – we are not allowed to do so nor do we have the resources. The good news is that the state has prioritized these roads for milling and resurfacing, we think this year.

Utilities Director Mitzi Delius has really stepped into her role as the City's newest department head in charge of water and sewer infrastructure and is pleased with the level of professionalism of her staff. The destructive Kentucky River flood last April almost led to the flooding of the raw water intake station, which would have ruined key technology. Ms. Delius and the water treatment plant team worked around the clock to keep water flowing to town in anticipation of this emergency, which mercifully didn't happen.

Her department has completed the AMI (or smart) meter changeouts and the Lead Service Line inventory. As part of a grant, the department is replacing aging water lines. The Boston Road / Kilmer area's water line replacement has just been completed. We are waiting for Columbia Gas to finish its gas line work and the streets there will be replaced. A new project has recently begun in the Camden area. Aging water lines are problematic because they require lots of maintenance; new lines should free up capacity to do other work.

In 2026, the Utilities Department will prioritize:

- Managing water/wastewater infrastructure development at Edgewood and new residential developments
- Verifying service line material in homes and businesses built after 1986 (approximately 1,100 out of 7,300 total to verify)
- Hiring an assistant Utilities Director
- Replacing outdated equipment
- Modernizing utilities billing
- Maintaining excellent water quality and sewer service for customers

Police Chief Rob Young and his team of lieutenants have continued to increase the professionalism of the Versailles Police Department. As a community, we should be proud of their efforts to step up hiring of experienced officers and dispatchers that will support a city with a growing number of residents and visitors and prioritize their safety and well-being. Getting its hiring right means that the VPD has been able to form a dedicated Traffic Unit, a Sex Offender Compliance Team, a new K-9 Team, and hire a part-time Cold Case detective. The VPD went live on its new radio project and continues to make improvements, as well as started a drone program with FAA-certified drone pilots.

In 2026, the Versailles Police Department will prioritize:

- Expanding the traffic unit
- Creating a new firearms range
- Maintaining excellent staffing levels
- Increasing community interactions
- Bolstering investigations unit to increase case closure rates

- Increasing training opportunities for officers, including FBI negotiation tactics and leadership training
- Pursuing training for two detectives as Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) investigators

Under the strong leadership of *Fire Chief* TA Rankin and Assistant Chief Brandon Brown, the Versailles Fire Department has had a busy year. Their biggest accomplishment was the response to the devastating April flood, where they rescued more than 70 people from flooded homes. Other achievements included completing the renovations at Station 1, launching the Fire Science Program at the high school, providing mutual aid in eastern Kentucky; getting a grant to add an addition onto Station 3, and answering a mayday call on Elkhorn Creek, where they rescued a kayaker and four firefighters from another county.

In 2026, the Versailles Fire Department will prioritize:

- Looking for funding to replace aging apparatus
- Starting construction on the addition at Station 3 that will enhance firefighter training
- Improving the city's ISO rating by working towards accreditation

City Clerk Elizabeth Reynolds and her department are the faces of City Hall and continue to provide excellent customer service to people who come by to pay bills, register businesses, or just ask questions. This kind of service is becoming increasingly rare, and I know people appreciate it. In 2025, cross-training of staff came in handy with the hiring and training of a new tax clerk at property tax time and some scheduled absences. The department didn't miss a beat! The audit last year was delayed due to the outside bookkeeper, so this year, the clerk has worked diligently to make sure this doesn't happen again. In her occasional downtime, one staff member put all cemetery information into a spreadsheet, so it is searchable by name, grave location, and more.

In 2026, the Clerk's Office will prioritize:

- Finding property tax software to allow the City to send out tax bills electronically and allow people to pay their bill or search for tax information online
- Applying for a grant through the Department of Libraries and Archives to digitize city records

Challenges

In last year's State of the City, our challenges (Door #3) were illustrated by the less-than-desirable prize, which in the TV show was often a farm animal, like a goat or mule. Housing affordability remains a persistent issue for both potential homeowners and renters. We are looking at pieces of land within the USB where more affordable housing could be constructed, and we have had discussions with developers who do this kind of work. Woodford Habitat for Humanity is also looking for small parcels to build homes on; unfortunately, parcels are hard to find and are often priced out of range. The Housing Task Force is meeting this week to reexamine the Landlord-Tenant Act – something the council had discussed a few years ago – to ensure landlords are providing the

very basics to tenants, like heat and air-conditioning, so tenants can enjoy safe, comfortable housing conditions.

With commercial and residential development comes more traffic, another challenge with which we are contending. We are working with the District 7 staff of the KY Transportation Cabinet and our state legislators to move traffic safely and efficiently, including roundabouts and R-cuts on the south end of town. I am proud that the council passed the “Build or Bond” ordinance last year that requires developers to build their connecting roads first or bond the money upfront before they begin building housing. This ensures that streets are connected, which relieves traffic pressure on major arteries. I mentioned the VPD’s Traffic Unit earlier. With better enforcement of traffic laws, we encourage less aggressive driving. Comparing the last four months of 2025 with the last four of 2024, speeding citations were up 131% from 154 to 355. We are taking road safety seriously.

Opportunities

Door #4 last year was the one that remained closed because what was behind it was yet unknown. Based on what I knew at the time, I predicted or at least suggested the possibility of funding freezes from the federal government, mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, mass resignations or firings of federal workers, stiff tariffs on Canadian, Mexican, and Chinese goods, resulting in higher prices for US consumers, and job losses as companies cut costs. I’ll be telling fortunes after this meeting.

We must be prepared for some uncertainty. I said this in 2025, and I can restate it in 2026. Rather than the door remaining closed, we have enough information to crack it open. Has Versailles been affected by actions at the state and federal levels? Yes, in a number of ways.

- FEMA has paused our project that will install a large generator for raw water intake at the water plant. We are waiting for the go-ahead to continue, but no word yet.
- We waited a year longer to hear that we’d received Congressional Community Project Funding for the Paddock Drive extension.
- The police department has worked hard to build bridges with our immigrant communities, trying to alleviate fears that are rampant, even among people who have legal status.
- There has been a potential loss of business or planned business due to tariffs.

Despite challenges and uncertainties, we have such opportunity to be good and kind and generous to one another. The City will do its part by supporting the Woodford Foundation’s mission to help struggling families and older people; the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), which serves abused and neglected local children; and the Food Pantry for Woodford County, which serves so many residents.

I want to acknowledge the council for their efforts to do what’s best for this community. Thank you for your support, friendship, and hard work this past year. I look forward to what we can do together over the next months. Please come to me with your ideas on addressing the challenges we face.

In closing, Versailles has a bright future. Our business climate, geography, and natural resources put us in an enviable position in the region and state. Our most valuable resource, though, remains our people. Our commitment to each other means that we can solve challenges together and celebrate when things go well. It is my great honor and privilege to serve the people of Versailles.