

ROUGHLY EDITED TRANSCRIPT
CITY OF EUGENE
STATE OF THE CITY
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[Applause]

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[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: Good evening, everyone.

Wonderful to see you here.

I am your mayor, Kaarin Knudson.

And it's a privilege to welcome you to the 2026 state of the city.

That incredible musician was James Manuele playing classical flamenco guitar.

Thank you, James again.

[Applause]

In the lobby before our meeting, you heard the Japanese koto, a 13-stringed Japanese zither, and the internationally recognized Sheldon High School choir.

We have one more string performance to close out our program tonight, from south Eugene high school banjo phenom Henry Strid with Joe on guitar.

Among these local musicians, from around our community, performing here tonight, for you, we stretch over 2,000 years of musical history and all around the world.

Please join me in appreciating all of their performances one more time.

[Applause]

In a moment I will turn to council president greg Evans to formally welcome us to this program, but we first begin with a land acknowledgment.

Since time immemorial, the Kalapuya people have been the Indigenous stewards to our

region building dynamic communities, maintaining balance with wildlife, and enacting

sustainable land practices.

A land acknowledgement is a way of resisting the erasure of Indigenous histories and to Honor Native communities by inviting truth and reconciliation.

Following treaties between 1851 And 1855, Kalapuya people were dispossessed of their Indigenous homeland by the United States government and forcibly removed to the coast Reservation in Western Oregon.

As we consider the impacts of colonization, we also acknowledge the strength and resiliency of displaced Indigenous people.

The City of Eugene is built within the traditional homelands known as Kalapuya Ilihi.

Kalapuya descendants are citizens of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon.

They continue to make contributions in our communities here and across the lands.

We express our respect for the inherent political sovereignty of all federally recognized

Tribal Nations and Indigenous people who live in the State of Oregon and across the nation.

[Applause]

>> Evans: As you can see, folks, we're not lined up in order by height tonight.

I would like to make a quick announcement.

The City of Eugene is no longer invading cottage grove.

It's a joke.

It's a joke.

Welcome.

My name is Greg Evans, city councilor for Ward 6, city council president and host for tonight's evening.

We are honored that you are here to help celebrate what we accomplished together this past year.

The people who make this such a wonderful community.

I would like to introduce the members of the city council, Councilor Alan Zelenka Ward 1.

[Applause]

Councilor Matt Keating Ward 2.

[Applause]

Councilor Alan Zelenka Ward 3.

Councilor Jennifer Yeh Ward 4.

Councilor Mike Clark Ward 5.

And I already introduced myself so I'll skip over me.

Councilor Lyndsie Leech Ward 7.

Councilor Randy Groves Ward 8.

[Applause]

And Mayor Kaarin Knudson, mayor of the City of Eugene.

[Applause]

I would also like to recognize a few others in the audience for their service and dedication to this community.

First, would the members of the Eugene executive team please stand?

[Applause]

Stand up.

Thank you for your service and your leadership.

Next, I would like to ask any city staff to please stand and thank you for your hard work and dedication this past year.

[Applause]

If there are any federal, state, tribal or other local elected officials in the audience, please stand.

We appreciate your service to this community.

[Applause]

Lastly on behalf of the city council, I want to take the opportunity to thank the individuals who have served on our boards and commissions and committees this past year.

Please stand.

[Applause]

We appreciate your service and encourage all members of the community to consider serving on one of the city's boards, commissions or committees.

Thank you again and all of you please, you may be seated.

We'll move on.

Thanks.

[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: I'm going to steal a little bit of Councilor Evans' thunder and introduce the video presentation that shares our highlights of this year.

But before doing so I just want to take a moment to, especially thanks Councilor Evans and also Councilor Lindsey Leech who have served as our council president and vice president as council leadership for 2025.

Thank you to you both.

[Applause]

2025 was certainly a memorable year and although as a community we have many ongoing challenges to address, there's still much to celebrate, and now, we invite you to enjoy a video of a few of the highlights and accomplishments achieved this past year.

[Applause]



[Video with captions]

[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: That video certainly makes clear every day, Eugene is working on how to realize a more but also resilient and sustainable future.

For over a decade, the City of Eugene has worked to help businesses and residents rethink sustainability.

You've seen this in our partnership with the bold steps award and also, the bring's rethink business program, a certification that helps local businesses reduce waste, save energy and strengthen community resilience.

Tonight, we are recognizing several businesses that participated in the program this year.

Their dedication to resource efficiency and sustainability makes Eugene stronger and sets an example for others to follow.

And so first this evening, we recognize the certified ambassador businesses that have taken meaningful early steps and set a strong foundation for sustainable practices during this past year.

Their commitment shows that sustainability is achieved for businesses of all sizes and in all sectors, and they are leading by example in this work.

Ambassador businesses who are here with us this evening would you please stand and be recognized?

[Applause]

Next, we celebrate businesses who achieved the steward-level certification.

These businesses have taken additional steps to implement waste reduction strategies, conserve energy and water and , embed sustainability into their daily operations.

Their work reflects a long-term commitment to making sustainability the standard operating procedure.

Steward businesses who are here with us this evening would you please stand to be recognized?

[Applause]

And finally, we honor our businesses who stretched to be innovators and reached the highest level of certification within the rethink business program.

These businesses have adopted advanced best practices, invested in upgrades and are exploring the edge of what's possible for sustainable operations.

Their leadership represents such a thoughtful commitment to change, and it inspires others to follow and so tonight, we are very proud to recognize QSL print communications, sun river brewing's oakway pub, drop bear brewery, blue lotus chai, Lane County public services center for their commitment and accomplishments.

Please all of you would you please stand so that we can acknowledge your work.

[Applause]

Many of this year's rethink certified businesses took advantage of bring's green business grants, upgrading lighting, replacing inefficient equipment and making other upgrades and improvements.

This next round of bring business grants is now open and all eligible businesses are encouraged to apply.

This past year, we worked on many fronts to continue to advance our climate efforts to support low-carbon choices and to reduce waste.

This work shows how our local business community continues to lead in sustainability work.

It is a shared responsibility and a source of pride that builds on years of gold steps awards.

Every increment of improvement matters in our work on climate change, and so I just want to thank bring, our business leaders and partners and everyone working to make our city a model of resilience and innovation at every scale.

As we continue and celebrate how local businesses have reduced energy waste I also want to highlight a program that's new in 2025, the implementation of Oregon's recycling modernization act, which means that your recycling should be simpler and more reliable and more impactful, and whoever was clapping, absolutely!

[Applause]

Oregon's recycling modernization act stands out for its collaborative development and innovative approach to extended producer responsibility which requires packaging food paper and service wear producers to share in the responsibility for the full life cycle of these materials.

Similar to Colorado, Maine, California and Maryland, Oregon has a recycling system that fully accounts for the disposal of products and packaging, so the burden of waste management is not entirely downstream.

In Eugene this means that we now have expanded access to recycling and an expanded list of materials that can be reliably recycled.

This is really good news for all of those yogurt tubs and milk cartons or plant pots that previously fell into the category of wish cycling, a term that I introduced me to, that's when we wish something belonged in the recycling bin, even though it doesn't, but we want it to.

Now, when you put something into your recycling bin, you can be confident that that material will end up as something new and not in the landfill.

This work is a major step towards making recycling more transparent, reliable and effective, and it will have a big impact on waste.

You'll hear more about this work through the recycle on campaign, which was translated into 12 different languages, including Spanish, ensuring that everyone has access to culturally relevant accurate recycling information.

The Eugene community has absolutely embraced these improvements with enthusiasm, just like when we started allowing residents food compost to be included in your yard debris bins rather than having food waste end up in the landfill, as well.

So please keep an eye out for updated signage and bilingual outreach and update your own expectations and habits when it comes to packaging and materials that you didn't think could be recycled, and now, can.

Our city's waste prevention team is also always here to help.

Thank you to that team for all of their work this year to help us implement this fantastic new program.

[Applause]

And now, we turn to the artists.

And the return of the mayor's art show which just happened downstairs in this very building, and I am so proud and delighted to share with you all.

The mayor's art show is a long-standing annual exhibition produced by the City of Eugene's cultural services public art program to showcase local artistic excellence and our burgeoning creative community.

This year's show highlights diverse perspectives, backgrounds and disciplines and demonstrates the vibrancy and uniqueness of Eugene's arts community as it exists in 2025-2026.

The exhibited works in this year's show were selected by a committee of artists and art professionals and curated to highlight the creativity and conversation among artists who are enriching our lives through the visual arts.

More than 260 local artists submitted their work for consideration this year and 52 artists were selected by the jury to exhibit their work.

This year's jurors were Analee Fuentes, Jud Turner and Laura Vandenberg.

Now, I would ask if the jurors and all the participating artists in the mayor's art show to please stand so we can appreciate you in this contribution to our community.

[Applause]

And the envelope, please, because in addition to the people's choice award that will be determined by you, there are seven awards given to mayor's art show works.

Honorees would you please stand as I call your name?

The jurors' choice for two-dimensional work is...

(Reading name)

[Applause]

The juror's choice for three-dimensional work is Patricia Montoya Donohue's Woman of the Earth.

[Applause]

The mayor's choice for two-dimensional work is Susan Palsbo's Lady Eugenie.

[Applause]

And the mayor's choice for three-dimensional work is Karen Russo's wave of compassion.

[Applause]

The curator's choice is Soren Chopra's Sand Dollar Bolo.

[Applause]

The best depiction of Eugene in partnership with Shelton McMurphy Johnson House, and I can tell you this was a fascinating conversation to listen to among the jurors is Megan Belmonte's Eugene Aglow.

[Applause]

And finally, the Hult Center community's award is for Cindy Ingram everything all at once.

[Applause]

Incredible work, incredible community.

Thank you, and congratulations to you all.

This last bit of information related to our arts show you could consider like season 1 of your next favorite series with a bit of a cliff hanger right, because thanks to the incredible work of the art center we celebrated the mayor's teen art show earlier this fall.

And the teen awards from that show, the award winners are also here with us tonight.

Teen art show honorees would you please all stand as I call your names?

(Reading names) Congratulations to the future of art in Eugene!

The mayor's art show will be on display on all four levels through February 22nd.

Please vote for the people's choice award.

That could be tonight if you haven't already and please, also visit the venue on Broadway before February 2nd.

It's partnering with the mayor's art show to spotlight artists not selected due to limited space, and I want to thank the museum of techno art and the venue on Broadway for their support in expanding this platform.

We have such incredible partners in the arts center community.

[Applause]

Finally, in this very building you may have noticed other ways that we are reaching out and proudly sharing our identity as a city that punches and paints and performances way above its weight.

The Hult Center was designed to be the living room of Eugene.

And with a living room, we invite people in, and we help them feel at home.

And I want to say how grateful I am to the staff at the city who organized this event, who assembled all of the components of this day for you and also to our Hult Center managing director with our library and recreation and cultural services department, an incredible group of professionals that made all of this possible for us today.

And I want to thank them personally.

[Applause]

The commitment to excellence through all of this work shows up in evidence like launching the inaugural Hult high school theater awards that will reach out to high school music theater stars all across Oregon coordinating with Eugene symphony to bring free quarterly programs to kids and families in the Hult Center lobby and working with incredible community partners to do things like open the Hult center's new contemporary indigenous gallery.

The city exhibitions at the Hult Center indigenous gallery is a partnership between the Hult Center and the don dexter gallery.

Painter don Bailey is featured in 2026, and I hope you will not miss his powerful work as you are enjoying this building, enjoying the spaces and enjoying all of the work from mayor's art show that is distributed throughout this building.

Our next portion of this program in a moment is speaking about our community service award winners, introducing them to you all tonight.

But before that, I want to take a moment to honor some of the community leaders who we lost in 2025.

We honor Bill Dillinger, whose dedication to athletics and mentorship helped define Eugene as Tracktown USA.

We honor James Edmondson, a respected attorney and legislator whose leadership and advocacy for education and justice made a profound impact on Eugene and the state.

We honor Gill Hullen, a devoted youth sports coach whose decades of mentoring through kids sports at south usage high school left a lasting mark on Eugene's community.

We honor chuck and sue, founders of Springfield creamery and creators of Nancy's yogurt, pioneering spirit and deep ties to Eugene's arts and natural foods culture left a lasting legacy here.

We honor Doug, president of QSL print communications and a beloved Oregon ducks fan who set new standards for how we can show up in community.

We honor Gavin, long-time owner sun dance natural foods, whose passion for local food and community have made his store a cornerstone.

We honor Sharon Schumann, a gifted violinist and retired professor whose passion for music, education and community enriched Eugene's cultural life and inspired countless students, and we honor rick wright, CEO of market of choice, remembered for his generosity and commitment to local businesses and local families, who strengthened the everyday fabric of our community.

There are so many more.

We honor the people and the names who you are holding in your hearts right now.

Please join me in a moment of silence.

[Silence]

Thank you.

Every year, the community service awards recognize individuals and organizations who demonstrate excellence in leadership, a focus on building partnerships and outstanding initiative in service to our community.

This award is often described as an honor for community superconnectors.

And this year I'm so pleased to present this award to three honorees who come to service by their very nature.

It is really who they are.

The trio who have gone above and beyond to help our community navigate challenging, urgent and defining issues.

Our first 2026 community service award recipient is Deleesa Meashintubby.

[Applause]

Deleesa has been a tireless advocate for health adequate in our community.

As executive director of volunteers in medicine she leads a free clinic that provides essential healthcare to uninsured adults in Lane County.

She was a central part of the partnership that created the everyone village health clinic model that is such a fantastic success within our community.

[Applause]

Beyond her work at volunteers in medicine, Deleesa is a member of the peace health system board of directors, secretary of the united way of Lane County board and secretary of the Lane County medical society foundation advisory board.

She serves on the Bushnell university board of trustees and the pacific cascade federal credit union board of directors and the Eugene chamber of commerce board of directors.

Through all of these roles, Deleesa champions collaboration, equity and opportunity for all.

She is an incredible mentor, and she brings light into every room.

Part of this recognition we are presenting Deleesa with a certificate of appreciation that reads: In recognition of Deleesa Meashintubby for your exceptional service and dedication to the Eugene community, your leadership, and commitment have made a lasting impact, Deleesa Meashintubby, congratulations.

[Applause]

>> Okay.

I'll have your dollars out at the door in the back when you leave.

I just want to say, thank you, mayor.

Thank you, city.

Thank you, community.

I have my ride or die here with me, and that's my husband who allows me to do all of these things that I do.

I handed him the words I had written down so I'm just going to say this to you here.

Community service is not just with one person.

That word community is all of us.

We have a resilient city here.

We have a city that when they see the need, they work together to meet the need.

And what I want to say to you all tonight, never stop giving that service, because you know what?

We're better together.

We're stronger to talk.

And we're a much better community together.

Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: Our second 2026 community service award recipient is Armando Morales.

[Applause]

For more than four decades, Armando has been a cornerstone of cultural enrichment and advocacy within Eugene.

As a long-time educator he taught Spanish and Latin American culture in local schools, and universities inspiring generations.

[Applause]

In 1983, Armando cofounded Oregon's oldest Spanish language radio program which continues to provide music, news and cultural programming for the Latino community, truly for us all, you will recognize Armando's voice if you do not know him already.

His passion for the arts led him to form the musical group, performing and bringing Latin American music and theater to audiences across the northwest.

Beyond the stage and classroom, Armando's championed immigrant rights and organized community events like Eugene's celebrations, fostering inclusion and honoring tradition.

As a part of this recognition, we are presenting Armando with a certificate of appreciation that reads: In recognition of Armando Morales for your exceptional service and dedication to the Eugene community, your leadership in education, cultural advocacy and community engagement has made a lasting impact.

Congratulations, Armando.

[Applause]

>> Gracias.

Gracias.

Gracias.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you, mayor.

Thank you, and I'm going to say a few words.

Thank you to my wife.

She supports me to do these things.

Also, thank you to the organization of mecha, the university of Oregon, that they let me work with them.

Also, thank you to the museum of the university of Oregon also and adelante C.

Also, they let me work with them.

And led me to development.

I'm going to say the last thing you know.

We are right now in a tough situation, my community and only will I let you know that we are immigrants, we have hearts, we are humans.

And the only way, I believe, we can help our community is writing to our Congress and ask for amnesty or immigration reform for them.

This is the only way that we can help them.

Thank you for everything.

[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: Our third 2026 community service award recipient is Rusty Rexius.

[Applause]

Rusty is co-president of a family owned company that has been a part of Eugene's business community for more than 90 years.

Big birthday coming up.

Under his leadership, rusty has continued to provide sustainable landscaping solutions while creating local jobs and supporting the local economy, also an incredible partner in the City of Eugene's waste prevention program, fine detail, but absolutely, the case.

Rusty's commitment to service extends beyond his business.

He serves as vice chair of the pleasant hills school board, and he strengthens families and supports children within our region.

Through these roles, rusty demonstrates a deep dedication to education, family wellbeing and community growth.

Part of this recognition we are presenting rusty with a certificate of appreciation that reads: In recognition of Rusty Rexius, for your exceptional service and dedication to the Eugene community, for your leadership in business, philanthropy, and civic engagement, you've made a lasting impact.

Congratulations, rusty.

[Applause]

>> I definitely didn't hand my notes to my wife, and I said I had up to three minutes so I've got two minutes and 31 seconds exactly if that's okay.

Thank you, mayor for this honor, following Deleesa and Armando, I'm not 100% I'm in the right spot.

But 91 years ago my grandfather started Rexius Fuel for two reasons.

He wanted to improve the lives of the people that came to work at our company and jobs that they would be proud of.

And he did that.

And that seems like community service to me.

Several years later, they started Lane County -- campus life.

More community service.

40 years ago my sister started a local preschool, emerald child development center.

Hundreds of kids got very early care and attention that shaped their lives forever.

Some are probably here today.

Definitely, community service.

32 years ago my mom and my dad started a nonprofit, Christians as family advocates.

Their mission was to create a safe place for kids who were suffering the consequences of domestic violence.

Thousands of kids and their families have benefited from their and so many others' work, including the executive director here tonight.

That most certainly is community service.

20 years ago, my wife Susie helped launch and run and still mentors reaching out mentoring a school-based mentoring program at pleasant hill that comes alongside the most vulnerable kids in our rural school district and helps them navigate the very real challenges of their unstable lives.

I've seen that community service first-hand.

I have a brother-in-law, two nieces, my cousin's daughter, all are teachers in 4J and double school district.

There's no greater display of community service than teachers.

And then there's the coaching.

[Applause]

I have brothers, nieces and nephews and hundreds of employees who have given thousands of hours to young boys and girls to help connect them with the beauty and reality of sport and life.

It's a very real gift of community service.

As I've reflected on these nearly 100 years of the people that I am the closest to doing these amazing things, it occurs to me, community service is not something you do; it's who you are.

[Applause]

It just comes out.

It leaks.

And I followed suit I think, I hope, because that's who I am, at least who I want to be, and it's certainly been modeled for me, and I'm incredibly grateful for that.

I'm also incredibly grateful for the opportunities that I've been given to serve the thing we're celebrating today.

Many of you in the room are the ones who got to do this so thank you.

Mayor thank you.

It's an amazing honor.

I appreciate it.

[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: Amazing honor, amazing people, amazing community.

That's how it works.

It just makes sense.

Now, I'm going to move to the state of our city.

And I'll begin by sharing that last night, I was out running through the dark.

And that might sound odd, except it's something runners do all the time.

And I was thinking about this time we would have together this evening.

I'm thinking about our community, and I'm thinking about the almost inexpressible content of the past year.

Somewhere around the second mile, I also got to thinking about that famous quote, that imagination is more important than knowledge.

And it struck me in that moment that maybe it wasn't just a T-shirt slogan, but that Einstein was really encouraging us to put our attention mostly on the future.

To remind us that the world that we imagine, that we work towards every day is more powerful than the one that we have already seen.

And that our focus must be in front of us, among us, and expansive in its nature.

I was thinking about Toni Morrison, and how she spoke about the living and the grief.

About how she said that sometimes, we don't get through it whole.

We only survive in part.

We are forever changed by experience, and not always by choice.

And yet, still, we must be fearless, as beautifully as possible, and under completely impossible circumstances.

I was thinking about how Octavio Paz dreamed about living and unhurried lightning and how Mary Oliver reminded us we do not need to walk on our knees.

I thought about the landslide of rhetoric and policy that we have faced this year as a community and about how many people have been made to feel afraid.

I thought about how much energy has been dedicated to confusion and distraction and harm.

And I thought about how absolutely critical it is to demand better and how you all in our community deserves so much more.

[Applause]

When we gathered at this event last year, I had been your mayor for all of seven days.

And in the 364 days since, we've traveled 540 million miles around the sun and indeed some days have felt about a million and a half miles long.

It has felt we've been hurtling through space.

The past year has been described as unprecedented many times, but that is not the only way I would describe it.

It has also been surreal.

It's been sometimes heart-breaking.

It has been unjust and unfair, and inexplicably unmoored.

But closer to home, I would describe this year as resourceful, as courageous, deeply caring, invested, extraordinary, a community that is determined and resolute.

In the face of chaos we have been steady.

In the face of dehumanization, we celebrate our diversity with joy.

In the face of disorientation, we hold focus and in darkness we have chosen to stand together to give light, and find the way.

And we choose hope, and we choose to share it.

And for those reasons, and so many others I'm proud to report to you that the state of your city is so very strong.

[Applause]

In the face of disconnection, Eugene has remained connected, and we have continued, as a city, day in and day out to work for the betterment of our community.

We have done so with openness, integrity and ingenuity, and I want to thank our entire city council for all of your service, I believe, 100 meetings you've held the past year to meet the needs of our community to do the work of our communities, and I want to again thank the city teams who are in this room, the people who are working for us every day and our staff in central services, fire and EMS, public works, the library recreation and cultural services team, Eugene police and planning and development.

I want to thank them all for their professionalism and their care, because 2025 asked us to dig deep and boy, did we.

[Applause]

Tonight, we'll report on the past year, but we will put our attention on the future.

Looking back and looking ahead, you will see your city working for stability and innovation through partnership, partnership with our institutions and universities, with our business community and housing developers, with our transportation advocates, our youth advisors, our social service agencies and so many more.

When I stepped into office, our city was facing an \$11 million budget gap and over that first six months together we worked intensively to negotiate a balanced budget that balanced and maintained access to our core community services, that reduced our costs and created the time that we needed to engage more partners with the critical work of designing long-term budget stability.

It is always my expectation that we will find smart solutions when we take the time to build understanding of the problem that we face.

I know this is a cross-cutting concept right now.

We hear continuously in rooms outside of this one that it is not possible to do anything.

It's not possible to believe in anything.

It's not possible to trust anyone.

And I want you to know that my expectation is exactly the opposite.

My expectation for us is that we will be creative, and we will be courageous and we will rise to every occasion and face the challenges of 2026 and the 21st century together as a community.

In 2026, city council has made the budget the focus of their work.

To support that effort, a group of technical advisors with expertise in finance and economic development volunteered their insight.

Their first phase reports will be delivered to council later, this month, and I hope we will have their continued engagement with this work into the future.

I know the city council cares deeply about our service continuity, about costs and about the sustainability of this community.

And as your mayor I will champion our shared success in this collaborative work.

Eugene is an incredibly special place.

We did not become this way by accident.

We continuously reinvest.

We are home to Oregon's flagship research institution.

We draw from the excellence of smaller universities and community colleges throughout our community.

We are city, of fantastic neighborhoods and beloved parks in a region that holds a wide diversity of jobs and industries.

We sit along meandering wild rivers at the foot of beautiful ridgeline recreation.

And we have a larger labor force than ever, 90,000 people strong, but our region faces lagging indicators in income, business formation and innovative jobs, and this is an opportunity that we have to address.

A few weeks ago I joined our university presidents and statewide business leaders to discuss the southern Willamette Valley corridor.

It amplifies the goals set out in our strategic plan related to job creation and sustainability, economic development, described as a corridor, because it connects Oregon's two research institutions, the university of Oregon and Oregon State university with the workforce, the amenities, the community, the delight of Eugene Springfield and Corvallis.

Through this framework we're working towards a future in which new jobs in advanced manufacturing and other industries and local business expansion are part of what our community and businesses and graduating students routinely plan for, where the startups spinning out of the university of Oregon and the knight campus have a place to land.

This work can support better connections between downtown, and the university, and it's also important to support our workforce and access to higher wage jobs.

The focus on this partnership and on other partnerships and collaboration, these were defining choices in 2025.

One of the things that I've heard realtime it this year is that we are doing things differently, and I understand why that resonates, because Eugene loves to do things differently and better.

It is one of our core competencies.

I want to thank OSU President Murthy and university of Oregon President Schultz for the energy that they have brought to this idea.

We have different roles and responsibilities, but this alignment of effort to expand opportunities and to build a better future in the southern Willamette Valley is incredibly powerful.

It's a piece of the puzzle that has been missing, and I will testify tomorrow in Salem about how this work connects with the governor's economic prosperity road map.

Some of Eugene's work is transformational and some of it is follow-through.

As scheduled we completed \$10 million in street improvements in 2025.

We also fought to keep and won the federal funding for our airport construction project from the FEMA grant that was used to complete the Amazon creek restoration.

[Applause]

We did open three beautiful new renovated parks, the 25-acre willow bent park in northeast Eugene, the renovated Martin Luther King park, a whole new toddling kind of demographic to the city center and city hall that I just love.

The only parallel I've seen to that was last night when the performance up in the larger theater was released out onto the sidewalks.

Small children in every direction.

Absolutely, fantastic moment.

One of the highlights of my 2025 was the all-ages community bike parade that we held in September to celebrate this completed river front playground and the cycle track that links our ridge line trails with our river bank trails.

Absolutely, a highlight of the year.

And high street is also such a great example of the importance of protected and separated pathways for people walking and biking.

When we build it, people use it.

And it's wonderful to see.

[Applause]

We permitted 413 units of new affordable housing this past year, 293 of which had support from Eugene's affordable housing trust fund.

We also invested \$7.5 million in the creation of 75 new units of affordable housing at fourth and mill a project that we will complete in partnership with homes for good, Lane County's housing authority.

We opened 130 new units of housing in the red brick portal building along the riverfront, and we supported future 393 Riverfront homes using our MUPTE program.

On the day that the portal open --

[Applause]

Every one of these units of housing, a new home for a new household.

On the day of that portal building opening, a group of six friends waited for me, because they wanted to make sure that I knew how incredibly lucky they felt to have found themselves in this chapter of their lives in Eugene, in the community that they have right inside of their building.

And after we said goodbye, young professionals working in science communications had waited, because they wanted to share with me how wonderful it felt for them to live in a home that reflected their values through access to a low carbon and car-free lifestyle.

This was all in the same building.

All the same village.

And joining that ribbon cutting reminded me of the many ways that Eugene nurtures villages in our community from the nightingale shelter that we heard about to square one's peace village, to intentional eco-villages and neighborhood cul-de-sacs.

The forms are different, but the feeling of shared community, the shared sense of home, familiar across all of them.

Last year, I talked with you and talked with a lot of people since about the importance of a renewed focus on downtown housing, and we built momentum in the downtown core housing initiative which is already including three new programs, the downtown fee assistance program, the accelerated MUPTE program and the property acquisition and disposition program.

To further expand our capacity in this work, last winter, I wrote essentially a grant application and applied for the City of Eugene to be included among the 47 international cities who were welcomed into the city leadership initiative that is supported by Harvard university and Bloomberg philanthropy.

This year, we will be focused on how cross-sector collaboration can drive new approaches to downtown housing and revitalization and you will hear more about this work and the recommendations from it by the fall.

In related work on downtown safety we've launched new programs and seen reinvigorated commitment to partnership.

Overall calls for police service are down, and in every area of violent crime our numbers have improved by double digits.

Calls related to quality of life are down by 25-52%.

And at the same time, our rapid response team saw a massive surge in use as we expanded the boundaries of the service area and increased operations to seven days per week.

None of the progress --

[Applause]

would have been possible without strong partnerships and relationships between the City of Eugene, our downtown partners, Eugene police and the community.

We are always working to match the right resources with the needs and many of the challenges that we see in our community have to do with vulnerabilities, not criminality.

We saw a major shift in our social safety net system last April with the closure of mobile crisis services in Eugene.

Shortly thereafter, Lane County mobile crisis stepped in to meet needs with a model of service that is only possible, because the base was paved.

Our community creativity is known nationwide.

A reporter asked me how it felt to hear the now mayor of New York mention Eugene in his inspiration.

We're now at the beginning, of a new chapter in this work to address the gaps between our public safety and human and health services systems.

This month a new downtown peer navigation pilot has already launched, and we are issuing an RFP to provide a higher level of support services and case management, 2.0 chapter of work to connect people with the appropriate support, which is oftentimes not a police officer.

Both of these pilot programs are partially funded by the community safety payroll tax and demonstrate our commitment to innovation and collaboration, and what we learn from them will inform our work in the years ahead.

We bring determination and creativity to the challenges we face, because it's who we are and also, because we have to.

And along those same lines, I think it is time to begin thinking differently about Highway 99.

Its future is as a safer, greener, multimodal boulevard.

It should not be a place where people are dying while trying to cross the street.

[Applause]

This corridor is a gateway into Eugene and also a community conduit and our expectations for it will change the moment we stop calling it a highway and start treating it as a public realm designed to safely connect community.

It needs to be reimagined and as is the case with so many other examples, we can bring a renewed spirit of collaboration to this work.

As I said last year, a continuous focus in our work is on concentrations of positive energy and lasting improvement, and here are three examples of how that could look in the year ahead.

First, we will continue our work on two transformational downtown redevelopment projects, 1059 Willamette project and the butterfly lot redevelopment, which will together add hundreds of units of mixed income housing to a downtown district that has not seen new residential investment like that in years.

We will also work with city council -- I will also work with city council to support actions that are specifically designed to catalyze workforce housing, housing that is affordable to our middle incomes and emerging households.

We have an opportunity --

[Applause]

We have an opportunity to pilot the state's new moderate income revolving loan fund this year and to help create new land trust housing in the City of Eugene, excited to move forward with this work.

In May, speaking of excitement, Eugene will also have the opportunity to renew our library levy, investing in five more years of critical stability --

[Applause]

For public library system that served 700,000 visitors in the downtown Eugene Library last year and another 127,000 visitors at the bethel branches.

Our library programs served more than 31,000 participants across Eugene and almost 99,000 people hold library cards, including all students in 4J and bethel school district, even if they live outside of city limits, and our participating charter schools.

Library access, and early literacy is a core support to the families, the kids, the quality of life and the future of Eugene.

[Applause]

And finally, for tonight, this year will mark a milestone for the Eugene Springfield fire and a transition in local fire governance.

About 15 years ago, many of you might remember that the Eugene and Springfield fire departments merged operations.

This functional merger created one of Oregon's most successful interjurisdictional partnerships, not surprised it happened here, but the absence of a unified sustainable governance model has hamstringing our ability to effectively plan for and invest in the capacity that we need to meet our community's needs into the future.

In December your city council indicated a preference for the creation of a new intergovernmental entity with the City of Springfield, essentially moving to a proportionally representative governance model similar to how we manage the metro area waste water system.

A second option is that our cities return to independent fire services, backed by a strong mutual aid agreement.

But the status quo is not an option and moving to a sustainable governance model will stabilize fire services into the future, will take care of our workforce to ensure that we have emergency response and fire services when we need them, and that work to set up that new model will happen in 2026.

As is probably obvious at this point, the year ahead is an incredibly full plate.

We have a lot of work that we are expecting to do for our community to deliver for our community.

We face challenges and opportunities in every phase, and we also have major transitions.

We welcomed a new independent police auditor this past year, and tomorrow --

[Applause]

We will have the three finalists for our new city manager position interviewed in Eugene.

We will make one of the most consequential decisions of this year in the coming weeks.

A new administrative leader will join an incredibly strong team and together we will continue to be steady and inclusive and hopeful and focused in our work.

It is absolutely a privilege, and I've tried to say that every time I have the opportunity to speak with people in our community, absolutely, a privilege and a responsibility to be Eugene's 40th mayor, to celebrate service, the arts, sustainable business, music, and our shared future on one stage.

It is incredibly important to me.

I think it's incredibly important to us that we see ourselves together, that we spend time together, and that every Eugenian see themselves and feel a part of the future that we're building together.

We are absolutely all in this together.

We are stronger together.

And through every collective effort, we model our values of strategic responsiveness and belonging.

We are not interested in the patterns of overwhelm and isolation that are modeled by others.

If someone hopes to make you feel afraid, they will first try to make you feel alone.

And I promise you that there's no one in this community who is alone.

I do not expect us to be perfect in our work, but our consistency of care is defining in how we care for this community is transformational.

With your city council, staff and our partners, I will do all that I can to help us gracefully navigate this year ahead, to seize the opportunities and step up to the challenges.

We will stick together in this work.

We will rely on one another.

We will put our best feet forward.

And I will stand with you and for you in all of our work.

Thank you for being with us here tonight.

[Applause]

Thank you, everyone.

Now, as we close, I would like to welcome Henry Strid with Joe Suskind to the stage.

[Applause]

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[Applause]

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[Applause]

>> Mayor Knudson: Thank you, Henry and Joe.

Thank you all and good night.

We'll see you soon.