

2024 Portsmouth State of the City Speech (Final Draft)  
-5/3/24-

Hello and welcome to the 2024 Portsmouth State of the City.

Wow...isn't this facility wonderful.

And what a great place to again host our State of the City.

To our friends at Rivers Casino...and to the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce...

Thank you!

It is great to be here with you today...

And, thank you all for making special effort to attend the City of Portsmouth's annual report to the business community on the current state of our great city.

This opportunity happens only once a year...and this past year...a lot has happened in Portsmouth.

[Pause]

I have a lot of Portsmouth-specific things I want to call to your attention this year...

And...I am also excited to tell you more about the Portsmouth City Council's Vision of Portsmouth's future.

Our economic development prioritization of job and business creation...

Expanded home ownership...

An enhanced and more specialized workforce training and certification programs that are in demand and encourage businesses to locate and expand in our great city.

This year friends, I wish to make the most of this opportunity.

I hope that you will leave today feeling good about Portsmouth's true potential.

So, today, I want to call attention to the topics most important to our business community.

My remarks are a little over 40 minutes...

I have been thinking about what to say in the speech for an entire year.

So, thank you in advance for your indulgence... and thank you for being such good friends to Portsmouth.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to offer special recognition to my friend, Portsmouth City Councilman, the Honorable RADM Mark Hugel, US Navy retired.

Councilman Hugel was recently selected as Portsmouth's 2024 "First Citizen."

Will you please join me in congratulating Portsmouth Councilman RADM Mark Hugel, US Navy retired, Portsmouth's 2024 First Citizen.

[Mayor leads applause]

Keep up the great work Councilman Hugel.

Thank you to all for coming and thank you for your continued interest and support.

I am excited to provide the Portsmouth and region's business community with an update on the current state of affairs in our great city.

Today, I want to talk with you about the things we are doing to continue making real progress in our city...creating good paying and sustainable jobs...increasing our homeownership and property values.

All of us working together to build a better Portsmouth.

You see...**"Our future is whatever we make it...so let's make it a great one!"**

Thank you, now let's get started with the speech by first telling you a little bit more about Portsmouth citizens.

In my conversations over the past year, I have been surprised to find that most do not know our city's basic demographic profile.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics' most recent count, Portsmouth's population is 95,535.

Our ethnicity profile is 52% Black/African-American, 40% White, 3% Hispanic, 2.6% Multiple Races, 1% Asian, and .04% American Indian.

What it tells me is that Portsmouth is an All-American city...diverse and strong.

Portsmouth's 2022 Median Household Income is \$57,154.

And our 2023 Unemployment rate was 3.6%.

Not bad business community.

Not bad.

Do you remember during last year's state of the city, when I mentioned the City of Portsmouth was nationally recognized by Realtor Dot Com as the number one place for 1<sup>st</sup> time homebuyers in the entire United States!

[Mayor Pauses 3 seconds and looks to both sides of the room]

You heard me correctly...

Just last year, Portsmouth was ranked the # 1 place in the Nation for First Time Homebuyers.

They used census data, population counts, household income, average commute times, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, business pattern data, and housing sales forecasts...

All of this was done to determine in a comprehensive way which city is **the very best place for 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyers to buy their first home in the ENTIRE UNITED STATES.**

All combined, new home buyers want to locate and purchase their first home in a healthy market that supports equity growth and in a city that offers the best promise of a return on investment.

So, what does all this mean?

What **specifically** does this mean to Portsmouth and her citizens and businesses?

It means my friends...Portsmouth has diversified real estate housing options that other communities simply cannot offer.

[Mayor pauses and takes a drink of water]

It means...Portsmouth has good housing stock and the promise of a good return on investment.

It means that combined...Portsmouth has diversified housing stock, desirable multifamily housing options, and more affordable housing options than most similarly situated communities.

Examples of this can be seen around Portsmouth, like:

1. The Port Apartments
2. Bains Pointe
3. Professional Building @ 545 High Street

This national recognition by Relator Dot Com tells me Portsmouth offers a quality market rate of return with a better promise of a good return on investment than most other communities...

With this influx of new 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyers, we are seeing properties being renovated and increasing in value.

We are seeing our neighborhoods getting cleaned up...

We are seeing more citizen participation in our civic leagues...

Young people are moving to our great city to start a family...

We are starting to see a renewed pride in our communities...and in our city.

You see, our city struggles with many of the same issues being confronted by most similarly situated urban core cities.

But the most important thing I wish to leave you with is this...

Portsmouth is a good place to call home...

Our city is a good place to make a better return on your investment in a house.

And this my friends is a major component of the Portsmouth City Council's Vision for our great city.

Where we want to go...

Where we want to prioritize our focus and efforts to accomplish some very specific things for the betterment of all Portsmouth citizens.

We want to focus on these areas because they simply offer the best possible return on investment.

In the coming year, the Portsmouth City Council wants to focus on:

1. Increasing access to home ownership.
2. Increasing residential and business property values.
3. Enhancing our citizens' access to good paying jobs and world class workforce training and certification programs that are in demand and being sought by our current and future businesses in this marketplace.
4. Wise infrastructure investments.
5. Targeted economic development that leverages our city's strengths and market concentrations...we want to maximize our potential in the areas in which we have the best chance of success.

This is what we are after here in Portsmouth.

[Mayor pauses and takes a drink of water]

The truth is that current market conditions necessitate a need for a more focused, strategic, and entrepreneurial city government.

It's a competitive world out there...

We need to raise our level of performance to compete in this global and now BLUE economy.

And, we need to raise our level of performance to effectively compete in this new global economy.

The good news is we have a lot to build upon here in Portsmouth...lots of momentum.

I will tell you more about the Portsmouth City Council's Vision later in the program.

The citizens and businesses of Portsmouth are customers of the City of Portsmouth...

We aim to improve our customer service as an organization by increasing our responsiveness.

[Mayor Pauses]

**The City of Portsmouth is going to be more accountable**...more accountable for results....more accountable for doing what we say we are going to do.

More accountable in insisting upon wise economic investment for the betterment and improvement of our citizens' quality of life here in Portsmouth.

We aspire for the City of Portsmouth to be a true **service-oriented organization** that is inclusive, responsive, helpful, equitable, accessible, transparent...and accountable.

And we will do just that...

[Mayor Pauses]

Now, please let me introduce you the **Portsmouth City Council**. If you would please stand as your name is called:

1. Lisa L. Lucas-Burke - Vice Mayor.
2. William E. Moody, Jr.
3. De'Andre A. Barnes.
4. RADM Mark A. Hugel.
5. Vernon L. Tillage, Jr.

Thank you for your dedication, Portsmouth City Council. Please be seated.

Now, please let me introduce our Portsmouth Public Schools Board Members in attendance with us today. If you would also, please stand as your name is called:

1. Dr. Cardell Patillo, Jr., School Board Chair.
2. LaKeesha "Klu" Atkinson, School Board Vice-Chair.
3. Irene Boone.
4. Dr. Melvin Cotton, Jr.
5. Quniana Futrell.
6. Yolanda Thomas.
7. And of course, Dr. Elie Bracy, Division Superintendent.

Thank you, School Board Members and Dr. Bracy, for your public-service and dedication to our children. Please be seated.

Now, please let me introduce **our Portsmouth Constitutional Officers**. If you would please stand as your name is called:

1. Sheriff Michael Moore
2. Cynthia Morrison Clerk of the Court.

Thank you for your public-service, Portsmouth Constitutional Officers. Please be seated.

Now, please let me introduce our **Council-Appointees**. If you would please stand as your name is called:

1. Steven Edwards interim City Assessor.

2. Lavonda Graham-Williams.

Thank you for your dedication to Portsmouth. Please be seated.

Now, please let me introduce the **City of Portsmouth's Administration.**

If you would please stand as your name is called:

1. Steven Carter City Manager.
2. Stephen Jenkins Police Chief.
3. Nestor Mangubat Fire Chief.

On behalf of a grateful City Council and the citizens of Portsmouth, thank you for your dedication to our city.

[Mayor leads applause]

And lastly, but certainly not least...please allow me to thank the many City of Portsmouth employees.

Nothing really is possible without you...you are the backbone of our city.

To the Portsmouth Police, Fire and Emergency Services folks...you are appreciated more than you know.

We count on you in the times in which we need you the most.

On behalf of a grateful City Council and citizens of this wonderful city...thank you City of Portsmouth employees.

[Mayor leads applause]

And before I move on to the next topic, can I say **Portsmouth is blessed to be a military town.**

Some even say **Portsmouth is a Coast Guard town...**



Actually, Portsmouth was just redesignated as an official Coast Guard City...celebrations to come.

We'll I say we are both...and our city is better for having military service members that are active duty and retired as our neighbors and friends.

Portsmouth is a proud military town with a long maritime history dating back to the founding of this great nation...

The City of Portsmouth honors and values our military and our veterans.

On our city website, we are adding a military page that directly links to all 4 military commands and their base sites.

To our military, thank you for protecting our great nation and service to our country.

[Mayor leads applause]

This happens to be as good of a time as any to tell you about a recent wonderful development and outstanding example of Portsmouth's partnership and friendship with Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

Right now, at Portsmouth Naval Hospital, they recently established a State-of-the-Art and fully staffed Level 2 Trauma Center.

For those who may not know, a Level 2 Trauma Center can initiate complete care for all injured patients 24-hours a day, seven-days a week.

That means they have general surgeons and specialists on duty to cover any type of injury, including critical care.

Thanks to Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Portsmouth citizens now have access to a Level 2 Trauma Care Center.

Prior to this partnership with Portsmouth Naval Hospital, our citizens had to travel to Norfolk to get to the closets Level 2 Trauma Care Center.

And, as you all know, every second counts in these types of situations...

Portsmouth Naval Hospital being open to serving our citizens means lives are being saved.

On behalf of the City Council and Citizens of Portsmouth, thank you Portsmouth Naval Hospital leadership and all who were involved in making this partnership happen.

This is a tremendous gesture...and an outstanding example of partnership with our military community.

Lives are being saved...

Portsmouth lives are being saved because of this partnership.

So, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you.

Will you please join me in thanking Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

[Mayor leads applause]

Thank you.

Now, I would like to talk with you about some of the most significant economic development investments occurring across the city.

Did you know...Portsmouth has experienced over \$1.5 billion dollars in new private capital investment in our city in the past six-years.

Did you know this?

\$1.5 billion dollars of private investment right here in Portsmouth in the past six-years.

Well, that means something to us, doesn't it?

This \$1.5 billion includes major projects such as:

- the \$340 million investment at Rivers Casino.

- the \$84 million investment by Lineage Logistics' cold-storage distribution facility, just to name a few.

This is significant to Portsmouth.

These kinds of private-sector investments signals to the rest of the world that our businesses have confidence in our city and are willing to make sizable investments.

Let me get a little more specific about the most important economic development initiatives currently happening in the City of Portsmouth:

Let's again talk about the newly created Portsmouth Innovation District.

An innovation district is defined as a place-based urban development strategy that aims to regenerate an under-performing area into a desirable location for innovative businesses and land use.

Did you know the City of Portsmouth has received \$24 million dollars in federal and state grand funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant funds...

We are working to revitalize the High Street Corridor within the newly established Portsmouth Innovation District.

The RAISE grant funding will be used to transform our High Street corridor into the greenest street in Hampton Roads.

It will include new streetscapes infrastructure, pedestrian safety improvements, and enhanced stormwater management and mitigation.

The Portsmouth Economic Development Authority grant funding is also being used by eligible Portsmouth businesses to improve their facilities and the appearance of their buildings...

They are using this money to increase the value of their properties...and we are beautifying our city streets as well.

I have a few of many examples within the Portsmouth Innovation District producing real-world results that I wish to share with you.

Did you know that co-working space seems to be what is in demand these days...especially in Portsmouth and in Portsmouth's Innovation District?

Did you know this?

[Mayor Pauses]

It seems the days of large offices floor plans are not the rage any longer.

Let me tell you about Bloom Coworking.

They are a co-working office space provider to entrepreneurs and small business owners.

In fact, business has been so good for Bloom Coworking that they recently completed an 8,000 sq ft expansion of office and meeting space for their customers here in Portsmouth's Innovation District.

We also have the expansion and popularity of IncuHub, and the recent opening of The Mustard Seed Place, an innovative hub and resource center for women entrepreneurs.

For those of you who may not know, businesses like Bloom, IncuHub and the Mustard seed Place...

They bring together entrepreneurs looking to grow and connect.

They offer services to entrepreneurs and small business owners by providing mailboxes, conference rooms, private offices, and coworking space for a fraction of what it would typically cost to have an office.

You see, today's entrepreneur and small business owners have much different office space needs than 20 years ago.

So, please allow me to signal to you the Portsmouth business community, here's a good stock tip to consider...

There is a lot of pinned-up market demand for co-working office space here in Portsmouth.

I personally would like to see more co-working office space made available throughout Portsmouth.

Could be a great investment or business to consider for sure...

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

The next economic development topic I want to share with you is an update on Rivers Casino.

Yes, Rivers Casino opened its doors last year and has exceeded all expectations.

Rivers Casino anchors the City's developing Entertainment District.

This has been and continues to be a true game changer for the City of Portsmouth...

Portsmouth is blessed to have the first permanent commercial casino in all of Virginia.

Did you know that?

Portsmouth has the distinction of being the first permanent commercial casino in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Rivers Casino will serve as the catalyst for spurring additional investment throughout the Victory Boulevard Corridor and across the entire city.

I will talk more about Rivers Casino and its financial performance later in the program.

But rest assured, the citizens of Portsmouth are prospering from Rivers Casino and they will for many years to come.

This was a wise investment with incalculable economic development benefits to Portsmouth.

Now, I wish to change topics by simply asking you what should Portsmouth aspire to be?

What's our destination?

Where are we trying to go?

And, I have been putting a lot of thought into this as of late.

We have so many tremendous assets and resources to build upon here in Portsmouth but what, ultimately, are we aiming to achieve.

It's one thing to say we wish to create jobs, but it is perhaps better to know where the jobs will be created and in which industries.

So, I will take the chance today and say:

*Portsmouth should aspire to be an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#).*

[Mayor Pauses]

When I look at all that Portsmouth has and should build upon for maximum effect, I say to you that Portsmouth should aspire to be an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#).

You see, we are ideally located for what is called "port-centric commerce and trade."

The sheer concentration of military organizations in our region needing ship-building and repair is a large factor to build upon.

We also have lots of natural resources to take full advantage.

The equation has now changed with the completion of the U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers Elizabeth River Channel Dredging and Widening Project.

The Port of Virginia's wide shipping channel is now open for two-way passage of ultra-large container vessels, which are also known as ULCV's.

In addition to widening the channel, the Port of Virginia is also dredging the Norfolk Harbor so that it is also 55ft deep.

This on top of Portsmouth's Ocean approach being 59 feet deep makes us ideally situated and geographically blessed.

The larger cargo carrying capacity of these ULCV ships reduces the amount of time spent berthing by as much as 15%.

Upon completion of this \$450 million dollar project in 2025, the Port of Virginia will have the deepest and widest channels on the entire USA East Coast.

Yes, pretty amazing ...

And the market is already responding here in Portsmouth.

Let me share a few exciting examples of Portsmouth already working to become an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#):

First, there's UNIS Logistics.

The UNIS Logistics is a \$20 Million Dollar investment that resulted in the construction of a 70,000 square foot state of the art warehouse right next to the Virginia International Gateway Terminal.

The UNIS Logistics Warehouse will provide immediate accessibility for the transloading of shipping containers for the distribution of consumer products throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

70 new jobs are being created in the maritime logistics support industry with this investment.

And there's more...

Mills Marine and Ship Repair.

Mills Marine happens to be 1 of only 2 black-owned ship repair companies in the entire United States.

Very soon Mills Marine will be the only black owned certified ship fabrication company in the nation.

Mills Marine, also, creating new jobs in the ship repair business...right here in the Great city of Portsmouth.

Next, there's JRF Ship Repair.

JRF Ship Repair is a Hispanic-owned ship repair company that recently completed its headquarter expansion, right here in the great city of Portsmouth.

So now they have two separate locations in the city.

And JRF Ship Repair is also creating new jobs, expanding, providing great service to their customers in this [Blue Economy](#).

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

The next example of Portsmouth making more progress towards becoming an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#) is Crofton Construction Services, Inc.

Just last year, Crofton Construction Services created 50 new good-paying, sustainable, jobs right here in Portsmouth.

Crofton Construction Services plans to create 75 more good-paying, sustainable jobs, this year in 2024.

That's 125 newly created, good-paying, high-skilled jobs...created, right here in Portsmouth in just 2 years, by just one outstanding Portsmouth business.

We all wish you continued success Crofton Construction Services...keep providing good services to your customers, create more jobs to meet your demand...that is what it is all about.



But there is more...actually, there are many more examples of small, medium, and large businesses expanding or being created to respond to the expected increased demand for maritime industry and ship building and repair.

Last example of the expanding maritime industry in our city...

Fairlead Integrated.

Fairlead Integrated recently invested \$40 million dollars along the Portsmouth waterfront.

Fairlead Integrated acts as an auxiliary campus for supporting Huntington Ingalls Newport News Ship Building.

Fairlead Integrate supports the fabrication of the Nation's Ford-Class Carrier Fleet and the Columbia-Class Carrier Nuclear-Powered ballistic missile submarine fleet.

Since opening, Fairlead Integrated has already created 200 new, good-paying, sustainable jobs right here in the great city of Portsmouth.

Would the representatives of UNIS Logistics, Mills Marine and Ship Repair, JRF Ship Repair, Crofton Construction Services, Inc., and Fairlead Integrated please stand and be recognized.

Thank you for all that you and your companies are doing to create jobs and help our city become *an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#)*.

[Mayor leads applause]

Thank you everyone...Please be seated.

So, what does all the Portsmouth-specific maritime economic forecast data show us?

It shows us this is where the jobs will be created...jobs supporting the maritime industry.

Right here in the city of Portsmouth.

I just highlighted a few of these maritime business job creators...in this [Blue Economy](#).

Additionally, there has been significant private investments also recently made right here in Portsmouth geared towards supporting and incubating maritime-related support businesses.

This means more people moving to Portsmouth and in our region to assume these newly-created, good-paying, sustainable maritime-related jobs.

Don't believe me...

Take a look at this map of Portsmouth that shows you how many maritime-related support businesses that are "clustering" right here in Portsmouth...some examples:

1. Fairlead (multiple) Wavy Street, Victory Blvd, Chataqua Ave.
2. Collins Machine Works at 702 5th St.
3. JRF Ship Repair off of George Washington Hwy.
4. Mills Marine.
5. Crofton Industries at 16 Harper Ave.

There's plenty more.

Do you see the clustering?

Maritime businesses supporting other maritime businesses want to be in close proximity to each other...it's called clustering.

And this is a good thing, especially for Portsmouth.

Not only do more jobs get created...but property values go up.

Local commerce and trade increases...and this is how we grow a local economy.

So, to bring it back...what does all of this mean?

It means we need to do all that we can to support, incubate, and expand these maritime-related support businesses in our city.

This is where the demand is for skilled labor to fill these new, good-paying, sustainable jobs being created.

So, I say let's take the robust maritime industry already established here in Portsmouth and build upon it.

More ships and cargo will be coming our way with our newly deepened harbor and easier access for the larger container ships.

What can we do to better support and perhaps incubate these maritime-related businesses?

In the past, it seems we focused our economic development efforts on diversifying the types of businesses located within Portsmouth.

And in some cases, that is still appropriate.

But, the biggest opportunities for economic growth, for job creation, and business expansion here in Portsmouth...it's in the maritime-support industry and the newly emerging [blue economy](#).

And so, I say again, *Portsmouth should aspire to be an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#).*

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

The next economic development topic of importance to the city of Portsmouth and our region is offshore wind energy production.

The emerging offshore wind energy market will continue to be significant to Portsmouth and the Hampton Roads region.

As I discussed with you earlier, Portsmouth has a lot of natural resources to build upon already to facilitate our becoming an east-coast maritime epicenter.

55ft deep Harbor, world class Virginia Port Authority and Port Terminals, unobstructed clearances thanks to our many tunnels that lead directly into our Port.

So, with all of these wonderful things all added together, we have really created a unique position for ourselves in this market place.

By this I specifically mean, there has been significant wind energy infrastructure upgrades already made at Portsmouth Marine Terminal.

The Virginia Port Authority is investing more than \$220 Million Dollars to modernize the terminal's cargo yard.

This is all being done to rebuild the berth and berthing space.

They are reworking the vessel mooring configurations.

Why is the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Virginia Port Authority investing more than \$220 Million Dollars at our Portsmouth Marine Terminal?

Because the Portsmouth Marine Terminal offers the very best location on the entire east coast for accommodating large wind monopile towers and their immense wind turbine blades.

First, we are blessed to have minimal to no overhead obstructions to our harbor thanks to our tunnels.

This allows for easier passage for the larger cargo vessels like the ones used in transporting the off shore wind turbines and other components.

Secondly, you cannot just pull up to any port and expect them to have the kind of infrastructure and laydown space to accommodate these large and difficult to move wind energy generation components.

So, Portsmouth Marine Terminal now is the only place on the east coast that is set up to accommodate these wind energy generation vessels transporting tall and preassembled monopile wind towers and their large wind turbine blades.

Do you know what this means?

It means Portsmouth is very well-positioned to become the Offshore Wind Staging and Logistics Support Hub for the entire east coast.

Did any of you happen to notice this week the Orion offshore wind installation vessel and its large crane just off Portsmouth's shoreline?

All I can say is wow!

These off-shore wind components and equipment are huge.

And that was only vessel.

Dominion Energy is preparing for the installation of 176 monopiles at Dominion Energy's project site located just 27 miles off the coast of Virginia.

It will be the second largest offshore wind farm in operation globally when complete.

These are exciting times to say the least.

You will be seeing more of these monopile towers and off shore wind turbine blades being transported around our harbor and eventually moved into their new positions to start harvesting wind energy.

[Mayor pause 2 seconds]

And I am happy to report that good progress is being achieved with our friends over at the Hampton Roads Regional Alliance and the Commonwealth to advance our collective goal...

So, let me say it again...our goal is to become the Offshore Wind Staging and Logistics Support Hub for the entire east coast...

This absolutely is an achievable goal...one that Portsmouth wholeheartedly supports.

The newly emerging wind energy generation industry will create more opportunities for creating businesses and jobs here in Portsmouth.

And so, I say again, with all of these great natural resources in place, the investments that have already been made, and the growth and clustering of maritime businesses already occurring within Portsmouth...

*Our vision for Portsmouth is to aspire to be an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#).*

*Our shared goal is to become the Offshore Wind Staging and Logistics Support Hub for the entire east coast....*

This is our vision...this is our goal.

Now let's make it happen business and community leaders....!

Thank you.

[Mayor takes a step back, drink some water, and pause 3 seconds]

Now, I would like to transition topics and tell you about Portsmouth's waterfront redevelopment efforts that are currently underway.

This really is the last puzzle piece in terms of redevelopment for our city.

I would even go as far as to say we have the premier waterfront development site in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

However, for this to meaningfully work, we absolutely must get Portsmouth's most valuable and visible waterfront property performing at its highest and best use.

Did you know that 43% of Portsmouth's land is currently owned by a federal, state, or real estate tax-exempt nonprofit organizations.

And did you also happen to know that most of Portsmouth's tax-exempt land is located on some of our most valuable waterfront real-estate.

This is a topic for another time...I say this only to make a point.

It is critical to get Portsmouth's most valuable and visible waterfront property performing at its highest and best use.

To accomplish this, the city has undertaken a rather ambitious and well-thought plan to start our efforts to redevelop our waterfront.

Phase 1 of our waterfront redevelopment plan is called Crawford Bay.

Crawford Bay is the site of the former Holiday Inn and Visitor Center.

The Civic Center, including the Civic Complex, City Hall, and City Jail portion of this redevelopment, will be advanced once the City Hall and the City Jail relocation is complete at a later date in subsequent phases.

The good news is that Crawford Bay Development is now ready for market.

Recently, our Economic Development Authority completed a Market Analysis for Phase 1: Crawford Bay Development.

Some of the key findings of the Market Study showed:

1. There is sufficient demand to support a 100+ room Class A hotel.
2. There is demand for 250 multifamily homes.
3. And, there is commercial demand for mixed-use development for restaurants, retail space, and entertainment uses.

In other words, this area, called Crawford Bay is ripe for redevelopment.

And so, later this year, the city intends to move forward in earnest with a solicitation for development interest.

We would like to consider the private-sector's ideas for how we can begin to redevelop our downtown waterfront to its highest and best use...

And...we want transform our downtown waterfront into its magnificent potential.

Stay tuned for future updates from the city...and let's get excited about redeveloping our downtown waterfront.

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

Now I have done my best to describe our vision to be an East Coast "Maritime Epicenter" in the newly emerging ["Blue Economy."](#)

I also highlighted some examples of maritime businesses starting or expanding right here in Portsmouth.

These are the places that are creating the new, highly-paid, sustainable jobs...now and into the future.

I also told you about the City and Region's efforts to support and incubate these maritime-related support businesses.

In furtherance of our vision, we have also set an achievable goal to be become the "Offshore Wind Staging and Logistics Support Hub for the entire East Coast."

I mentioned the investments made at the Portsmouth Marine Terminal to accommodate the larger cargo vessels by rebuilding our berthing area and reworking our mooring configuration.

I also told you that Portsmouth and Hampton Roads is exceptional in that we do not have the overhead bridge obstructions like other east coast ports, which makes us uniquely positioned.

We are also right in the middle of the east coast with some great rail connection.

At Portsmouth Marine Terminal we will be the only place that can realistically support the Offshore Wind Industry on the east coast.

It's all very promising and a lot to build upon...a clear vision.

A clear goal.



All of the ingredients for success are already here.

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

Now, I wish to change topics and talk about how we are building our people.

Small business development support for entrepreneurs and small business start-ups remains a key focus for Portsmouth.

Quite honestly, Portsmouth has become the region's destination for individuals looking to launch their business and pursue their entrepreneurial dream.

In 2023, the Portsmouth Economic Development Authority provided \$73,000 Dollars in funding support to new Portsmouth Small Businesses through its Business Investment Programs.

Just last month, we held a ribbon cutting and officially opened Bloom Market.

This is an exciting initiative to incubate small retail businesses right here in our downtown.

Bloom Market is a Retail Pop-Up Shop launched through a collaboration between the City's Economic Development Authority and the Portsmouth Partnership.

It provides brick-and-mortar physical retail space in downtown Portsmouth on High Street for Portsmouth-based makers and retailers to launch and grow their product lines.

This is intended to provide a robust ecosystem to incubate small businesses.

When we speak of building our people that includes making sure our citizens are ready to participate in the employment and career opportunities that we are bringing to Portsmouth.

The City's Portsmouth@Work program is working to do just that.

Providing our residents with the training and certifications in the skilled trades that result in opportunities for direct employment.

All at no cost to our residents.

We are also focused on workforce development efforts for at-risk youth.

Portsmouth@Work has partnered with the Portsmouth Redevelopment Housing Authority, to launch the city's first YouthBuild program to enroll young adults aged 18 to 24 in training for the building trades.

This program emphasizes community service, leadership, and personal growth, empowering participants to become successful, self-sufficient adults and positive contributors to their communities.

And the City of Portsmouth also works with regional workforce collaborative initiatives, such as:

1. Hampton Roads Workforce Council.
2. Maritime Institute.
3. Urban League of Hampton Roads.
4. United Way.
5. Virginia Employment Commission.
6. Virginia Career Works.

Thank you to each of these partner organizations for your work.

Through our collaborative efforts, we are equipping our citizens with the resources and support they need to build a brighter future for themselves and their communities.

Now, let us talk about what is happening over at Tidewater Community College.

TCC's renewed focus is to ensure that the faculty and staff are meeting the needs of industry in Portsmouth and Hampton Roads by better connecting industry with local skilled workers from our community.

TCC's current and future expansion and programming at their Skilled Trades Center in Portsmouth are aimed toward accomplishing just that...

The majority of TCC's Skilled Trades Center focuses on the maritime trades – welding, pipefitting, sheet metal, coatings, and shipfitter, all of which are VSRA/MTT certified.

And think about this...at TCC's Skilled Trades Center, the Port of Virginia is one of TCC's tenants in their facility.

The Virginia Port Authority's co-location at TCC Portsmouth Skilled Trades Center is brilliant...

But, probably the most exciting news is that TCC Portsmouth is expanding from their original 16,000 sqft and adding an additional 12,000 sf in the same building.

TCC's new section will be focused on the building trades – construction fundamentals, carpentry, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, flooring, masonry, wallpaper/drywall, rigging, roofing, scaffolding, building/facility maintenance, forklift, and heavy equipment operation.

I am also happy to report that the city continues our efforts to enhance our partnership with military to identify retirees looking for a second career.

In Hampton Roads, three are more than 15,000 people retiring from the military each year.

I know personally as a small-business owner that military retirees are highly sought after employees.

Want them to retire here in Portsmouth and have a 2nd career.

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

Now let's talk about some good things happening at Portsmouth Public Schools.

The Class of 2023 was awarded \$15.4 million in merit-based scholarships, and our high-school graduates were accepted into 170 colleges and universities.

This past year we also had 131 graduates earning college credit through the TCC First College Program.

And, this is actually quite impressive...in 2023, Portsmouth Public School had 26 high-school students graduate with a completed associate's degree through the Early College program.

More good news about Portsmouth Public Schools...

In the Class of 2023, 1,637 students earned an "industry credential," which is nationally recognized by employers for skills needed in a specific field/workforce.

You make use very proud...congratulations on your well-deserved recognition and thank you for your dedication to Portsmouth's children.

Now that we have discussed the ways in which the city of Portsmouth is helping to build people, I now want to now talk with you about what we are doing to protect our citizens.

Since April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Portsmouth has experienced a **34% reduction in violent crime incidents and violent crime victims since April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023....one-year.**

And since April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Portsmouth has also experienced a 21% reduction **in property crime incidents and a 22% reduction in property crime victims.**

This is great news...

When we look at major crimes over the same time period, Portsmouth has experienced 22% reduction in major crime incidents and major crime victims.

[Pause 3 seconds while scanning the audience]

How have we done this?

1. Technology Integration.
2. Enhanced police training and development.
3. And, better collaboration and communication with other law enforcement agencies and the Community.

The City of Portsmouth has invested in Flock's Raven Gunshot Detection, more license plate readers and increased the number of our public cameras and are utilizing the Fusus Real Time Crime Center.

Fusus is an advanced platform that integrates technologies like video surveillance, sensors, and data analytics to offer real-time situational awareness.

We have also significantly upgraded our E-911 Call Center.

In November 2023, we successfully launched the final component of our Next Generation 911 System.

All of our crime data has now been moved from analog to digital infrastructure.

This makes sure our police, fire, and emergency service department can effectively communicate with each other during emergencies.

We have also placed more cameras in our school zones as a means for deterring speeding and to promote compliance with the speed limits we have posted in our school zones.

And lastly, each year we hold the "National Night Out."

Here, we bring law enforcement agencies and communities together to promote police-community partnerships, neighborhood camaraderie, and overall safety awareness.

It provides a unique opportunity to residents to interact with our police officers in a positive and welcoming environment, fostering enhanced trust and mutual respect.

Crime, is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach for finding effective solutions.

It is critical for the Portsmouth Police Department to engage with citizens in a collaborative partnership.

The success of our city hinges on the strength of the relationship between our police officers and the community they serve.

The safety of Portsmouth citizens is our highest priority, and so we will continue to do all that we can to stop crime before it happens.

[Pause 3 seconds and scan the audience]

The next topic I wish to discuss with you today is the City of Portsmouth's current financial and fiscal health.

All these investments that have been made in our infrastructure...

Investments in our healthcare....

Wise investments and prioritization of our workforce training and certification so that our citizens have access to the training and skills they need to get the good paying sustainable jobs...

Our redevelopment plans for the Portsmouth waterfront...

The creation and prioritization of the Portsmouth Innovation and Entertainment Districts.

All of this is done to improve the quality of life of our citizens...

But we are also doing all that we can to attract new businesses, expand existing ones...create good paying jobs.

We want people to live and work in Portsmouth...

We want businesses to locate in Portsmouth and grow.

This is our vision...this is our direction.

**All of us working towards "Building a Better Portsmouth—Our future is whatever we make of it, so let's make it a great one."**

This is Portsmouth Proud and we have a lot to be excited about folks.

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

As I told you earlier in my presentation, 43% of Portsmouth's land is owned by federal, state, and nonprofit organizations that are tax exempt.

This means we have to do a lot more with a lot less...

Our City Council will soon pass the FY 2025 Operating Budget and Capital Program:

The Portsmouth Council is sensitive to the economic pressures we all are feeling with rising health care cost, food, electricity.

And so, the Council maintains the effective real property tax rate of \$1.25 per \$100 assessed value.

**We fully funded the \$78.0 million Portsmouth Public Schools request, which by the way is a \$15.0 million increase from the previous budget.**

The upcoming Budget provides additional funding for improved housing support services, workforce development, parks and recreation, museums, and increased infrastructure maintenance staffing.

The FY 2025 Budget also provides salary increases of 3.5% for city-funded employees.

Now, regarding the use of Rivers Casino Gaming Revenue:

This budget programs \$15.8 million of gaming activity related disbursements into the following top 4 priorities among many:

1. Real Property Tax.
2. Portsmouth Public Schools.
3. Public Safety.
4. Personal Property.

For Capital Projects, this budget includes new funding for the following Capital Projects:

1. Portsmouth City Jail's Relocation from Crawford Street to the regional jail site.
2. Public Safety Facility for Police and Fire.
3. Housing Resource Center.

4. City Park Reimagined.
5. City Fiber Network.
6. Neighborhood overhauls of water, sewer, stormwater and streets infrastructure.

Additionally, the City is meeting all of its financial obligations and is maintaining its very strong AA Bond Rating.

As I told you earlier, more than \$1.5 Billion Dollars in private investment has happened in the City of Portsmouth in the last 6 years.

In 2023, the Portsmouth Commissioner of Revenue's Office renewed 4,953 business permits.

They also issued 288 new businesses permits.

So, we have a lot of business activity going on within our borders.

And...our public investments are paying off.

And so, I say to you again...

**“Together we are Building a Better Portsmouth—Our future is whatever we make of it, so let's make it a great one.”**

[Pause 3 seconds and scan the audience]

I hope you are now more excited about Portsmouth!

So, with all of this combined, I can say to you that the current financial and fiscal health of the City of Portsmouth is **strong...**

The prospects of our becoming an east-coast maritime epicenter in the newly emerging [blue economy](#) are very real.

And, when you consider the investments and infrastructure improvements that have already been made at Portsmouth Marine Terminal...



Our unobstructed and deep harbor port...

Our geographic location in the middle of the east coast...

We have a real opportunity for Portsmouth to become the Offshore Wind Staging and Logistics Support Hub for the entire east coast.

With all of this combined...everything that I have told you about today...I say to you again that the state of Portsmouth is **STRONG!**

Our city's prospects in the future are even **Stronger...**

So, let us all do what we can to support our maritime industry...create some good paying, sustainable jobs.

And let us all prosper...

What do you say business community?

Can we do this?

I say we can.

[Mayor pause and take a drink of water]

I wish to close now by asking for your help with a couple important matters...a challenge to the business community.

First, our young people need you, especially our young men that are desperate for mentors and role models.

Secondly, this year, please consider committing yourselves to volunteering for good causes, especially ones that help Portsmouth and Portsmouth's youth.

Third, please do your part to make sure our higher education and workforce development organizations know what skills are in demand.

What classes and training they should be providing...

Fourth, I encourage you all to engage with Portsmouth's state and congressional elected officials more energetically about Portsmouth's priorities that they can help with...

The squeaky wheel sometimes gets the oil....sometimes.

What do we need here in Portsmouth that our congressional and state delegation can help us with?

We need toll relief for the citizens and businesses here in Portsmouth...

More so than any other city in this region.

These tolls are going to continue to increase each year.

And we feel the impact of these tolls here in Portsmouth...every single day.

So, if you have the opportunity, please let our elected leaders know we need their help.

I thank you for your attention and interest in the City of Portsmouth.

On behalf of the City Council, we welcome and celebrate your partnership...

The City of Portsmouth is definitely open for business and business is good....

Thank you and God bless the City of Portsmouth!