

## **Mayor Dr. Julie Metzger Aubuchon**

### **State of the City and Budget Address**

**2023-2024**

Tonight, I am honored to fulfill my duty as Mayor and present the State of our City. As the Mayor of Florence, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our proud city with its rich history. This marks my first State of the City and Budget Address, coming 164 days into my Administration. After serving for 24 years as a City Council member, I have seen many budget presentations. But it is a special feeling for me tonight. I know that my council experience has effectively prepared me to present this year's budget in my first year elected to the office of Mayor. I am grateful to my family who encouraged me to seek this role. I take pride in the city's accomplishments thus far and look forward to what we will achieve in the year ahead.

As the Mayor of Northern Kentucky's leading city for shopping, entertainment, business and diverse housing options, it is my pleasure to represent my hometown. I represent a team of six council members, over 250 dedicated employees and hundreds of city volunteers that work tirelessly to deliver top-notch city services, offer bountiful recreation opportunities and ensure safe neighborhoods.

One of the first things that I did as Mayor was to meet with every department of the city and the supervisor level employees of our departments within my first two weeks in office. I felt it important for our employees to know about me and the issues that I encountered while campaigning for this position. While I am not new to Florence, I recognize that our city should embrace our past success. But, to ensure that our organization will thrive for years to come, I must act as a change agent. Our path forward will require flexibility, transparency and cooperation. I am prepared to move this city forward and have developed priorities that will enable Florence to prosper. I shared with our employees my top priorities. We have made progress in these first six months with the help of our elected leaders of city council.

-Ensuring public safety is my foremost priority as Mayor. I am dedicated to supporting our police and fire departments by making changes to policies in this post-pandemic landscape. The

city accomplishes this by providing adequate staffing, and equipping them with the resources they need.

-Additionally, I recognize the importance of preparing for our infrastructure needs, including the maintenance of roads, sidewalks, and water and sewer lines.

-Offering recreational opportunities through our senior center, golf course, pool, and city parks is another focal point.

-Moreover, I aim to sustain economic vitality through smart growth, expansion planning, and the establishment of high design standards for new developments.

-I am determined to keep taxes low while delivering the quality services our residents expect.

-Lastly, my priority is to improve the quality of life for our residents.

\*\*\*\*\*

Since January 1, I have engaged with local community leaders and assessed the needs of our city. These relationships are the building blocks upon which we will continue to grow and set the foundation for us to provide an exceptional quality of life for our community. I feel it's important to connect with other organizations such as Boone County and my fellow Mayors of Union and Walton. In addition I have forged relationships with representatives of Duke Energy, Owen Electric, Boone County Public Library, Boone County Schools, the YMCA, the Northern Kentucky Area Development District, the Northern Kentucky Health Department, the Cooperative Extension Office and others who all work collaboratively to move Boone County forward.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now, let us reflect on the past year and look ahead to the future.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge retired Mayor Diane E. Whalen for her dedicated service to our city. I express my gratitude to Mayor Whalen and her staff for facilitating a seamless transition. Join me in thanking Mayor Whalen for her valuable contributions.

We also mourn the loss of our longtime City Attorney, Hugh O. Skees, in May. I am grateful for his legal guidance over the years. He has left the city in good hands with his law partner, our new City Attorney, Thomas R. Nienaber.

Furthermore, we bid farewell to several city personnel who retired last year, including Police Officer Matthew Raniero, Fire/EMS Lieutenant/Medic James Broughton and Firefighter/Medic Jim Flynn, and Public Services Department Personnel Pete Biggs, Mark Jones, and Ryan Sullivan. I extend my gratitude to each of them for their dedicated service to our city and wish them a fulfilling retirement.

Additionally, our city workforce has expanded across departments. Notable additions include Jeremy Miller, Austin Sams, John Dusing, Dakota Waymayer, Rob Nelson, Ben Horgan, Jacob Green, and John Vocke in the Public Service Department. The Fire/EMS Department welcomed Firefighter/Paramedics Eric Van Meter, Kyle Wiggins, Zach Greene, Nate Anderson, Dave Weghorn, Christian Ritchie, Jacob Shafer, Jacob Worley, and Timothy McElveen. The Police Department welcomed Macean Cook, Ryan Kilmer, Tanner Pinkston, Emmanuel Slaughter, Andrew Fields, Anthony Harmon, Austin Dupree, K9 Fargo, and K9 Ajax to their team.

As our city continues to grow, we recognize the need to expand our personnel to meet the increasing demands in each department. We remain committed to providing top-notch services to our community and strive to attract the most qualified individuals for the job.

As Mayor, I have taken it upon myself to set the tone and provide leadership, fostering collaboration between the city and city council for the greater good. I am proud of our Department Heads, led by CFO/HR Linda Chapman, Chief of Police Tom Grau, Fire/EMS Chief Rodney Wren, Public Services Director Eric Hall, and Business & Community Development Director Joshua Hunt. They are also committed to provide our citizens the best community and live up to our motto of Florence is the best place to live, work and play.

We welcome new faces to the city council, namely Lesley Chambers and Jenna Kemper, who join incumbents Mel Carroll, David A. Osborne, Patricia Wingo, and Gary Winn. I take pride in our council's collaboration and dedication to advancing our community amidst these ever-changing times. I have asked Council to obtain more training in order to accomplish their jobs representing the city. They have all responded favorably and completed many sessions already. I

have asked Council to look beyond the historic activities that we fund and to keep an open mind with regard to new initiatives. This council has proven that they are willing to debate and entertain new initiatives and are not stuck in the past. The City needs solid, proven leaders with an open mind for new ideas. We are fortunate to have those type of leaders on our Council.

With that being said, similar to the many challenges we have all experienced in our own homes and businesses with inflation, the city's budget is not immune to inflation either. The General Fund Budget proposal for 2023-2024 is \$48.5 million, with operating costs of \$36.2 million. This represents a 5.8% increase over the prior year. The city's capital items budget of \$10.5 million dollars. The city's general fund is largely driven by occupational license fees, insurance premium tax, payroll tax receipts, and real estate revenue.

While the economy has begun to rebound, we depend on its continued strength to fund the critical services we provide to the community. We will proceed prudently and cautiously, keeping in mind the overall financial environment. Each year, the city develops a budget that strives to balance the community's needs with the available financial resources. Florence is in a solid position to withstand economic challenges. Be assured that we will be financially prudent with the city's budget, continue to manage your tax dollars responsibly, and be mindful not to cause unnecessary increased costs to residents.

\*\*\*\*\*

Looking forward to Fiscal Year 2024, we are focused on continuing to provide the best services to our community through our Finance Department, Administration Department, Public Services Department, Police Department, and Fire/EMS Department. Each department will continue to strengthen their personnel and build upon the talent within each department.

When I say we hire the best of the best, we truly do, and that is confirmed by the awards received this past year and the certifications obtained.

The Finance Department was once again recognized by the Government Finance Officers Association for excellence in financial reporting and received distinguished budget awards.

Twenty-three of our Fire/EMS Department personnel were recognized for rapidly recognizing and transporting ST-segment elevation myocardial infraction patients, heart attack

patients, to the emergency room, as well as, recognition by the Target Stroke Program for rapid recognition and transport of stroke patients. Additionally, our Fire/EMS Department was recognized as the Department of the Year, as well as the Monica Rath Emergency Medical Service Award from the Northern Kentucky Firefighter's Association. Most recently, the Fire/EMS Department was honored by the Kentucky Board of Emergency Medical Service for their dedication with emergency care and pediatrics.

The Florence Police Department received qualification by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as an accredited department.

We strive to continue to provide our city employees with the best training and skills for their duties, and this year, several of them received certifications. Our team members in the Public Services Department obtained various licenses and certifications, including drinking water licenses, pesticide licensing, property maintenance and housing inspector certification, 811 pipeline safety certification, and vehicle maintenance certifications, among others. The Public Services Department, in collaboration with our Urban Forest Commission, achieved our first Tree City USA Growth Award and received our 30<sup>th</sup> consecutive year as a Tree City USA designation.

The Florence Police Department hosted the first-ever Northern Kentucky University School for Police and Command Staff, a ten-week program attended by 23 police supervisors from across the country, and four supervisors from the Florence Police Department successfully graduated.

The Police Department continues to lead the area in the DARE program. In the past year, they provided DARE training to over 800 students at six different city schools. Additionally, the department successfully hosted their Citizen Academy and Teen Academy. Through their annual No Shave November initiative, they raised \$2,285 for the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Cancer Unit. This November, please consider donating. We certainly won't mind seeing a few extra beards around the city for this worthy cause. Furthermore, they organized a 'Stuff the Cruiser' event where over 100 stuffed animals were collected and donated to the Cincinnati Children's Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House.

Our Fire/EMS Department actively promotes fire prevention and education programs in the community. They conducted fire safety programs and public education sessions at Colonial

Heights, Bengal Tots Daycare, All About Kids Daycare, and Yealey Elementary. Additionally, they organized the Truth or Consequences event at the RISE Academy, held fire prevention month activities in October, reaching over 1,500 students, and coordinated the Northern Kentucky Fire Prevention Poster Contest.

Many Fire/EMS Department personnel participated in the annual Tunnel to Towers 5K last September. This event takes place every September, and I encourage everyone to participate in this year's event on September 16.

The city purchased property on Dream Street to secure a site for a new fire station on the east side of the city. The addition of this fire station will assist with the abundance of calls received by the Fire/EMS Department. Construction is anticipated to begin on Station #4 this year. Through the collaborative efforts of this city council, Administration, Public Services Department and Fire/EMS Department, we are committed to providing our citizens and visitors the best possible care. The addition of this fire station is a reflective effort by all.

The Public Services Department is actively engaged in community outreach initiatives including organization of a community right of way cleanup collecting over 90 bags of trash from city streets, participation in Eagle Scout sponsorships, and the support of ensuring our city events materialize into reality. Without their support, these events could not be possible.

All city employees generously donated non-perishable Thanksgiving food items to St. Vincent DePaul for the Thanksgiving season. Additionally, city employees actively participated in our Angel Tree Program, providing Christmas gifts to students and their families at Collins Elementary. In December, the Fire/EMS Department, along with Santa, organized a 'stuff the truck' event to collect gifts for the Boone County Family Resource Center.

Our city personnel not only receive excellent training in their respective positions but also seize every opportunity to lend a hand to those in need. As Mayor, I couldn't ask for more.

\*\*\*\*\*

We are dedicated to serving our citizens, and I strongly believe that citizen participation plays a pivotal role in fostering a thriving community. Currently, we have a dedicated group of thirty individuals serving on various Boards and Commissions, each contributing their expertise

to different aspects of our city's governance. These include the Aviation Noise Abatement Committee, Boone County Planning Commission, Boone-Florence Board of Assessment Appeals, Boone-Florence Water Commission, Code Enforcement Board, Florence Board of Adjustment and Zoning Appeals, and Urban Forest Commission.

In addition to these roles, our police department sponsors thirty VIPs (Volunteers in Policing) who offer valuable support at numerous city events. Furthermore, we are fortunate to have seventy-two members in the Florence Community Band and twenty-five members in the Community Chorus, both of which enrich our cultural landscape.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all these volunteers who generously dedicate their time and efforts to our city. I would also like to reiterate my invitation to our citizens to consider serving on a board or commission. It is an incredibly rewarding experience, and I encourage anyone interested to visit our website, where you can find more detailed information about the different boards available and fill out a citizen volunteer form if you wish to serve on behalf of the City of Florence.

Without the assistance of all of our volunteers and input from all our departments, many of the city events we host would not be achievable.

In the past year, we hosted the 9/11 NEVER FORGET Mobile exhibit, which served as a powerful reminder of the importance of honoring the memory of those affected by the tragic events.

Many of our community events returned to in person for the first time since 2019. Our Easter Event was our largest ever and over 11,000 eggs were hunted! Youth in Government returned and provided each department the opportunity to interact with over 500 local students. The Memorial Day Parade provided an opportunity for us to honor our veterans and fallen heroes. Without them, Memorial Day would not be possible. Their service provides us our freedom. I thank each of one them for their service to our country.

I am proud to announce that we have expanded our events this coming year. We will be introducing a new Summer Concert Series, culminating in a Labor Day Weekend End of Summer Celebration. The city will also host our annual National Night Out, Halloween Night Out, Veterans Day Program, and the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting.

Additionally, I will be hosting additional Coffee with the Mayor events and continuing to meet with fellow community leaders and citizens to promote collaboration and collective efforts.

With the addition and expansion of our community events, I look forward to meeting more of our community. I truly believe through active engagement with our residents, we as a city, will ensure the resident's needs are met.

\*\*\*\*\*

The City of Florence is the 8<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state of Kentucky. We benefit from our location as a thriving suburb of Cincinnati. But we also face some issues that permeate the larger metropolitan area of Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati.

Our city and its residents face the same issues that are presenting throughout the country such as mental health crises, homelessness, inflation and food insecurity. Since taking office, I have participated in more meetings with regard to human needs, such as homelessness, than any other single topic. The City of Florence is following the lead of human services professionals at Boone County who have been working on providing the needed resources to our most vulnerable populations. Data has been collected and will now be leveraged to develop a plan that can provide housing security for many of our county's displaced residents.

Please understand that this work is hard. This work is not unique to Florence or Boone County. And this work is rarely, if ever, 100% successful.

To coordinate the provision of services to those in need within our community, I have requested that Council add the position of Human Services Coordinator for the City of Florence. I anticipate that this new position will bring connection to non-profit and social service agencies that can assist our residents in times of need. This position will not only focus on homelessness, but also early childhood, the elderly and those who are in financial need of assistance. The City does not intend to be a direct service provider. However, it is important that we connect our residents to those agencies that can provide assistance such as churches or other area non-profits.

\*\*\*\*\*



As Mayor, I believe in open government with transparency and citizen involvement and in focusing on our future. With that being said, as part of our upcoming budget, we will soon begin a master planning process that will take a long range look at our parks.

We are also funding some very important enhancements to our parks and roads. South Fork Playground will undergo resurfacing, as well as, resurfacing to the Saddlebrook Drive and Fowler Creek Drive bike paths. Improvements to Edward Avenue, Circle Drive and Schira Court, Magnolia Trace, Gunpowder Center and Roberta Street are a few streets which will receive improvements this year.

The City of Florence maintains over 377 city streets that encompass 174 lane miles and contain over 4,423 street signs, as well as, 185.4 miles of pedestrian/bike facilities. The Public Services Department performs yearly inspections on one third of all City owned streets and this information is entered into the departments Computerized Maintenance Management System – Cartegraph. The department publishes a three year repair/replacement schedule and is working on a long-term plan in order to determine future funding needs. One of the largest misconceptions is that people assume every street through our city is the City of Florence’s responsibility. Unfortunately, the city does not have any control or ownership of several major thoroughfares including KY 18, US 42, US 25, Houston Road and Pleasant Valley Road. Our city staff work diligently with the transportation cabinet to coordinate improvements to these roads based upon citizen requests for service. We were happy to coordinate with the Transportation Cabinet of Kentucky and celebrate a major east-west sidewalk connection on the US 42 bridge over I-71/75 that opened this spring.

In order to keep our residents informed about their city, there will be digital signage improvements to assist with citizen engagement and awareness in the community. I encourage everyone to utilize our Florence Y’all app to report any issues such as street conditions, zoning violations, sidewalk issues, speeding, or trash/debris. Residents can also use the online “Report A Concern” form located on the city’s website: [www.florence-ky.gov](http://www.florence-ky.gov). These types of technology are superior to typical social media platforms as they allow us to record and track progress throughout several city departments in an efficient and thorough manner. And citizens can get more information on our website with regard to requesting documents through an open records request with our city clerk.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the City of Florence's unwavering commitment to fiscal responsibility and transparency. In line with this commitment, I invite all citizens to take the time to review the City's annual budget, which is readily available on the official City of Florence website. The budget provides a comprehensive overview of our financial planning and allocation of resources, ensuring that our fiduciary responsibility is taken seriously.

By making the budget easily accessible to everyone, we aim to promote transparency and enable our citizens to stay informed about how their tax dollars are being utilized. It is our belief that an informed community is essential for fostering trust and collaboration between the city and its residents.

I encourage you to visit the City of Florence website and explore the annual budget document. Your engagement and understanding of our financial practices are crucial as we work together to build a prosperous future for our community.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am proud to highlight the remarkable economic development activities, priorities, and achievements that the city has witnessed in recent years. In contrast to communities that have scaled back their development efforts, I want to emphasize that Florence is always open for business! Our city has become a prime destination for new capital investment, with approximately \$1.6 billion in projects either under construction or in progress. This incredible level of growth and development is a testament to our commitment to fostering a thriving and vibrant business environment.

One notable achievement is the establishment of the Freedom Brewery at the Pickleball Ranch project. This groundbreaking initiative represents a multimillion-dollar capital investment and holds the distinction of being Florence's first-ever brewery and pickleball facility. This unique endeavor not only adds to the city's economic landscape but also provides residents and visitors with a dynamic recreational and entertainment venue.

Furthermore, we are delighted to announce that construction has commenced on the highly anticipated Drury Inn located on the corner of Industrial Road and US 42. This \$40 million capital investment plays a pivotal role in enhancing the corridor's appeal and serves as an exceptional new gateway feature to this section of our beloved city. The Drury Inn project exemplifies our

commitment to creating modern and welcoming spaces for residents and visitors alike, while also boosting the local economy.

This past year we welcomed several new businesses including Ford's Garage, Strive Health, Dunkin' Go, 19th Hole Golf Bar, Boot Barn, Black Cedar Studios, Grain Design Flooring, Tapestry at Turfway Park, Sierra Trading Post, M&P Logistics, and Townplace Suites Hotel, to name a few. The St. Elizabeth Hospital Campus underwent an \$80 million capital investment expansion to ensure our community has access to state-of-the-art medical facilities and services.

These achievements are just a glimpse into the broader economic development activities and priorities that the City of Florence has embraced. We are continuously working towards attracting and retaining businesses to stimulate further economic growth and prosperity.

Additionally, several ongoing projects are currently under construction, including CarMax, Amazon Last Mile Facility, and Cayton Road Apartments. These projects reflect our city's attractiveness for major companies and investments, further fueling economic growth and job creation.

The collective impact of these projects and developments underscores the city's commitment to create a dynamic and prosperous community. We strive to provide a favorable business environment, diverse entertainment options, and essential services by all of our departments for the benefit of our residents and visitors alike.

It is important for residents to understand that the Florence Mall is uniquely positioned for re-development. A common misconception is that our Mall is controlled by the city. The Mall is independently owned and managed by several companies that each control individual parcels. This configuration makes re-development of the Mall more difficult. It is important for residents to know that as a city, we are limited in our ability to influence the future of the Mall. But we will use all available means at our disposal, to ensure the economic vitality of the Mall Road corridor into the future.

As I reflect on the remarkable economic achievements of the past year, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge and express my heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable contributions of Council members Gary Winn and Pat Wingo. Serving as representatives on the Florence Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Committee, their expertise and guidance in evaluating new projects proposed

in Florence are of paramount importance in ensuring the realization of our smart growth objectives. The substantial progress we have witnessed in economic development in Florence is, in part, attributable to their unwavering dedication and service.

\*\*\*\*\*

As we continue to progress and build upon these achievements, we remain dedicated to fostering an inclusive, open and honest government in a thriving city that we can all be proud of.

The achievements and priorities outlined herein exemplify the dedication of the City of Florence to fostering a prosperous community. We remain committed to creating positive change through promoting sustainable growth, supporting local businesses, and creating opportunities that benefit everyone.

I am looking ahead in anticipation as we work together, residents – businesses – and civic leaders to ensure every person has an opportunity to be successful and contribute to our community. Our Fire/EMS Department, Police Department, Public Services Department, Finance Department and Administration Department is committed to continue to provide services that everyone has come to expect from Florence.

\*\*\*\*\*

In closing, I stand before you as the Mayor of this great city with a heart filled with gratitude and a vision brimming with optimism.

The State of our City is strong.

Together, we have faced challenges head-on, celebrated triumphs, and worked tirelessly to make Florence the best place to live, work, and play. Our community involvement, the dedication of our council and city personnel, and the unwavering support of our citizens have been the driving forces behind our success.

As we look ahead to the future, let us embrace the opportunities that lie before us. Let us continue to foster a spirit of unity, collaboration, inclusion and progress. Let us remember that our greatest strength lies in our unwavering determination to uplift one another, to lend a helping hand to those in need, and to create a city where every individual feels valued and cherished.

Together, we will build upon the foundations of our proud history and pave the way for an even brighter tomorrow. With innovation, compassion, and a shared sense of purpose, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

I am honored to serve as your Mayor, and I am humbled by the trust you have placed in me. My motto is to embrace change and take action on your dreams. With that mindsight, and the exciting energy within the city, Florence, let us march forward hand in hand, knowing that the best is yet to come. Together, let us continue to write the remarkable story of our city's success.

Thank you to all my City Council, city staff and our residents. May God bless you all and bless the City of Florence.

\*\*\*\*\*