

2026 State of the City Address

MAYOR JACOB FREY

May 5, 2026



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Good afternoon.

Thank you to the American Swedish Institute for hosting us. Thank you to our Council Members, elected officials, community leaders, City staff, partners, and neighbors—people who care a lot about this city, its future, and the people in it.

A tested city

This past year tested Minneapolis. We saw moments—from Operation Metro Surge to the tragedy at Annunciation—that pushed us to our limit: families torn apart; workers and students staying home; parents making different choices about how they move through their day. And through it all, Minneapolis showed something real: Grit. Endurance. And resolve.

We showed the world what it means to be a good neighbor, and stood up for something far more powerful than resistance alone. We stood up for love. And so, to this truly inspirational city of heroes: thank you for being a light in the darkness and the foundation of unity that holds our whole country together.

We got through it.

But getting through something is not the same as getting back on track. And today, I want to be honest about where we are. Because before we talk about what's working—and there's a lot that is—we need to talk about what needs to change.

The state of our city is strong, but if we don't get serious, our trajectory will not be.

Serious about the work. Serious about our priorities. And serious about working together to imagine and achieve the city we all envision. Because when we lose focus on that vision and our respective responsibilities, even just a little, people feel it. So today is about getting back to that work, achieving a vision together, and doing it with the seriousness people expect.

A few truths

In doing that, there are several truths to recognize.

First, we proved we can endure. We got through an incredibly difficult period, and we did it the way Minneapolis always does: we showed up.

Our Community Safety Officers delivered groceries to families afraid to leave their homes. Our Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs and City attorneys established strategies so we could fight for our residents and our city in court and win. Our Mobile Medical Unit was out in low-income neighborhoods, bringing healthcare and support to hundreds of residents. Our City provided over \$10 million in relief for small businesses and residents. And we kept doing the daily work of city government: plowing roads, fixing streetlights, and responding to fires.

This work matters. It says something about who we are. Council Members, it says something about who you are. We have different roles, but we lead the city together. But at the same time, endurance is not the goal. It's the starting point.

The second truth: Our responsibility does not end when the crisis fades. We don't need a new emergency to stay focused. We don't need a new enemy to achieve a common dream. We handled what was in front of us. Now we have a job to do.

Which brings me to the third and most important truth. We need to do the basics better. And we need to take that responsibility seriously.

For too long, we've allowed ourselves to get pulled away from that focus. Not because the issues weren't important, but because we lost discipline around what matters most. We tried to do everything—things that aren't always a local government's job—and in the process we didn't always do the most important things well enough. We've spent time debating things that are not the most critical parts of our job.

If you ask people what they want from their City, the answers are pretty simple. They want to feel safe walking down their street. They want clean air and safe water. They want to be able to afford their home. They want their business to succeed. That's the job.

So, here's what that looks like moving forward.

Public safety

Starting with public safety, because there is nothing more fundamental. People need to be safe and feel safe. That requires a comprehensive safety approach, which in turn requires a fully staffed, fully functioning police department that delivers.

The good news is we've seen over a 200 percent increase in applications to become an MPD officer since we began our push on recruitment. In 2023, we had 665 total applicants. In 2025, we had 2,328. That's a signal. People are stepping up and answering the call to serve this city.

We're currently sitting at 642 officers, up from around 550, and next year, we're hoping to reach our charter number of 733, with goals of exceeding that to reach more than 800 before I leave office. And we have the most diverse department we've had in history, with more officers who either come from or live in Minneapolis.

Staffing that police department and paying for it looks different. The cost of an officer today is higher than it was just a few years ago. We train more; we expect more; and yes, because of that, it costs more. That's why our safety leaders are doing the work to put a dollar amount on what that investment needs to be, so we budget accordingly.

Last year, violent crime went down in nearly every major category, from homicides to robberies, to carjackings and auto theft. As we head into the summer, safe streets will remain our top priority, and we will focus on proven strategies that work.

We also take pride in how we respond in critical moments. When tragedy struck at Annunciation, our response was immediate and coordinated because we underwent extensive emergency response training ahead of time. Our police officers entered the church without hesitation, directed children and teachers to safety, helped establish a triage area, and provided life-saving care to victims using their combat medic and paramedic experience.

During Operation Metro Surge, the City stayed focused on supporting the people of Minneapolis, especially our immigrant neighbors. Our 911 teams were a calming voice on the end of distressed calls. During what would typically be a quieter month, they worked around-the-clock to help reunite families and provide important information.

In the rest of our safety ecosystem, our departments are showing up.

Our Community Safety Ambassadors are out building relationships on East Lake and East Franklin, and soon will be in Uptown, walking the streets and providing a presence that has led to safer neighborhoods.

In our Neighborhood Safety Department, we're addressing gun violence through Group Violence Intervention. By building stronger relationships with people most at risk, we're seeing results – 98% of participants have reported no new violent activity.

Our Fire Department continues to save lives, not just by running into burning buildings, but through health initiatives. They've launched three Narcan vending machines and a second Safe Station. Narcan is being used, and overdose deaths are down.

And beyond our Office of Community Safety, our City departments are doing the basics to make our city safer. We've repaired more than 700 streetlights and now our backlog is officially gone, making our streets brighter and safer. By the way, that blighted Burger King on West Broadway that has been a focal point for narcotics? It's coming down and will make way for new community-based development.

And a cultural shift is afoot. There's probably not a city out there taking its training and reform work more seriously than Minneapolis. People saw the difference between how ICE agents treated people and the way our Minneapolis police did. But that's a pretty low bar.

So, we're doubling down on our efforts to strengthen accountability under the consent decree, because our Police Department must be the department that people can trust.

And that brings us to a broader truth about safety in our city: you don't get safety without getting serious about the conditions that shape it. Over the past eight and a half years, I've seen a lot, and it's changed how I think about order in a city.

Nowhere is that shift clearer than at the intersection of addiction, livability, housing, and business.

Take Uptown as an example. The perception of Uptown has been bad, but it's improving because of dedicated residents, business owners, elected officials, and City staff willing to be blunt and honest about the real issues facing that community.

Addiction is front and center. We address addiction by meeting people where they are, bringing care through our Mobile Medical Unit, expanding low- and no-barrier housing for stability, increasing access to Brixadi, a long-acting treatment, and partnering with the County to connect more people to care.

And at the same time, continued open use on our streets is devastating: for residents, for families, and for businesses, large and small. Compassion matters but it doesn't mean anything goes.

The progress we're seeing in Uptown is proof positive of what happens when we double down on the services residents expect. We're doing the following—

People need to feel safe. So, we've put a dedicated patrol unit in Uptown, keeping a regular, visible presence; stopping issues before they escalate; and addressing nuisance behavior head-on.

Streets need to be clean. So, we're expanding trash and litter pickup; cleaning graffiti; and making sure grass and vegetation looks healthy.

Storefronts shouldn't sit empty. So, we're activating them through our Vibrant Storefronts program and Technical Business Support.

Customers need easy access. So, starting now, we're announcing Free Friday Nights in Uptown, meaning that if you go to Uptown on Friday, you can park for free.

And our streets should feel alive. So, we're supporting the Uptown Farmers' Market, the Arts Festival, and Holidays on Hennepin to bring energy, art, and people together.

Affordable housing

Our job as City government is also to help provide a right to a home. If you want a stable city, you need affordable homes. That's why programs like Stable Homes Stable Schools matter. They work. Through this program, we've helped keep more than 7,500 students and their families in their homes. That means fewer disruptions, fewer moves, and more kids showing up to school ready to learn. And we're seeing progress beyond the classroom, too.

Right now, the number of unsheltered people in Hennepin County is down significantly compared to previous years. As of this week, 239 people in Hennepin County—not just Minneapolis—are actively working with outreach teams. Those 239 people are connected, known, and on a path toward stability. That is an 11 percent reduction from 2025; a 20 percent reduction from 2024; and a significantly greater reduction from 2020.

That number still needs to come down, but we're moving in the right direction. Our Homeless Response Team is out every day, connecting with unhoused individuals and working closely in ongoing partnership with Hennepin County, who helped move more than 3,400 people from emergency shelter to housing in 2025.

Moving in the right direction also means continuing to build across every part of this city and at every level. This past year, we helped build and preserve 890 affordable homes, and we've got nearly 2,000 more in the pipeline that will start to come online this year. You can see that progress in projects like Snelling Yards, bringing 95 homes to Hiawatha on a former storage site. Or at Opportunity Crossings in South Minneapolis, transforming a former Wells Fargo site into six stories of affordable housing, with green features like solar and rainwater reuse.

Minneapolis has become a national leader in affordable housing. We've increased the annual production of deeply affordable housing more than 5 times, from 35 homes a year to 185 a year. That's something to celebrate.

But moving forward, we also need to look not just at how much we build, but where we build it. For too long, affordable housing has been concentrated in the same areas, limiting opportunity and reinforcing inequality. If we want real upward mobility, we need to build affordable housing in middle and higher-income areas, not just the same places we've always built.

Let me tell you why this matters: When kids grow up in mixed-income neighborhoods, they see possibility. I don't want kids to think in terms of limitations, but potential. I want them to know the doctor, the teacher, the business owner, the carpenter, and artist—all on one block. I want kids from different levels of wealth to go to the same schools and play in the parks together. I want kids to figure out whatever they do best that benefits society the most.

We're making progress on this vision. We've made nation-leading changes in eliminating exclusionary zoning and we now require affordable housing units in all new market rate buildings. But we haven't finished the job. To keep that work going, we have to take a hard look at the reality of the housing market right now and what we can do to help. Costs are up. Interest rates are high. And it's harder for families to buy, rent, or stay where they are. That's not acceptable, and we need to do our part.

Our goal is straightforward: make it easier to build, improve, and stay in our city. And this will be a main focus of mine over the next few years.

I've directed City staff to evaluate our development process—from start to finish—and identify where we can move faster, cut unnecessary red tape, and give builders and homeowners clear, predictable paths forward.

One accessory example: Accessory dwelling units are allowed in Minneapolis but aren't built that often. So, we're streamlining the process by providing a number of pre-approved designs, dramatically cutting back on the time it will take to bring grandma closer to home or get the 24-year-old further from it.

We're also changing how we handle permits. Small-scale residential projects—the kinds of improvements homeowners rely on—won't be treated the same as large developments. Our goal is to move these permits through the system within one business day of application, so people can get to work without waiting weeks just to get started.

And I've tasked our Performance Management and Innovation team with overhauling our permitting system. It may not sound glamorous, but it matters. It means fewer hoops, less confusion, and a process that respects people's time. And fewer hoops means a faster transition to what's next.

We are laser focused on the inevitable and exciting shift from office space to residential. Through our Rocket Docket approval, we're fast-tracking office-to-housing conversions, turning underused buildings into homes for people who want to live here. If you're a developer looking to do this, you'll get administrative review, not a political one, drastically shorter wait times for approval, and potentially direct City support to get your project across the finish line.

Just look at the success of the Groove Lofts, which are now officially open, where a historic office space was transformed into hundreds of new, modern homes in the heart of our city. And just a few blocks away, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange is being converted into 232 housing units, most of them affordable, bringing new life to that corner of downtown.

Because housing isn't just about shelter; it's about economic stability. When people can afford to live here, they stay. That stability strengthens everything else in the city.

Economic development

And that's exactly what we're focused on: building an economy where businesses can start, stay, and grow.

For too long, we've treated businesses like a revenue source instead of a partner. That's changing. Being serious means our job is to set the table: make it easier to open a business, easier to build, easier to stay, and easier to grow. Just like with our housing work, this means taking a hard look at fees, permitting, and the back and forth with different City departments that slows progress down. That work is underway.

Operation Metro Surge hit our small businesses hard; hundreds of millions were lost. Through our City's Small Business Resiliency Fund, which we recently announced, we're providing licensing fee relief to over 2,000 restaurants, cafes, and grocery stores. That's \$1,800 they don't have to pay, and a lot of paperwork they don't have to fill out. We're just doing it.

We're also making it easier for organizations to host events. We're offering fee-free events so businesses and community organizations can activate their spaces, host festivals, and bring people back. Instead of paying a hundred or a thousand dollars to host an event, you won't have to worry about that. Just do the event.

And just last week, we announced \$1 million in grants through our Business District Support program, putting resources directly into the hands of 34 community-based organizations in all 13 wards who are part of revitalizing our city. They're going to be hosting events, expanding marketing, and building energy in our commercial corridors.

We're also bringing a renewed focus to providing a clear, galvanizing vision for the future. COVID-19 expedited a necessary transition away from full-time, in-person work. But we can provide an expedited vision for the next phase of Minneapolis.

The first part of that vision I've already mentioned: transitioning from office space to housing. By combining our Rocket Docket, quick administrative review, and direct subsidy, we will bring these buildings to new residential use and breathe new life into our streets. But that vision is not limited to residential. As a Council Member, we saw great success in North Loop and on East Hennepin reducing the square footage of retail

space, putting more doors and more businesses on the street. These are now bustling neighborhoods packed with action. We have not yet emulated that success in the core of downtown, and so it needs a jump start.

Among other tools, we are proposing a new use of TIF and other City partnerships. It's the right time because the value of many buildings has been lowered. With a lower basis, increased investment can go further, and the future valuation is higher. If you're willing to invest in a big vision for a building where the basis has been lowered, come talk to us. If you've got one gigantic retail space on Nicollet Mall, and you want to change it to a bunch of smaller ones, come talk to us. TIF might be right for you, and it might not. But partnership with the City will be a value add. All of this is driving a real shift downtown, but the most important change is already showing up in the numbers.

Today, more than 60,000 people call downtown Minneapolis home—a record. Because a “home” doesn't look the same for everyone. It's not always a house with a big garage or white picket fence. It's a downtown apartment overlooking the skyline where someone is making an omelet before work. It's kids playing on a playground just blocks from where their parents work, hopefully with an indoor option soon. It's where my mom and dad live, and possibly yours, too. It's people coming in droves to see the Minnesota Timberwolves crush the San Antonio Spurs, because if there is something we are crystal clear on, it's that NBA basketball belongs in downtown Minneapolis—and we intend to keep it that way.

That's our downtown. A place where people don't just work, but live. And they are some of the most active, energetic, and Minneapolis-loving fans in the world. We want them, and everyone else in our city, to have fun. That's why we're also streamlining our permitting and internal processes to make it easier for events like PRIDE, MODE Festival, the Prince sing-along, and Dinner du Nord to succeed.

You're also about to see big developments in big ways across the city. Not just downtown. We've got several major projects that have been years in the making that are finally happening. In a month, we break ground at George Floyd Square, rebuilding infrastructure, supporting small businesses, and preserving what matters most to the community, including memorials and art.

At the Southside Safety Center, design is complete and construction is moving forward—bringing critical services like mental health support, childcare, and youth programming under one roof.

On the Northside, we broke ground at the Upper Harbor Terminal amphitheater just yesterday, bringing a world-class music venue to a much-deserved area and reconnecting the neighborhood to the river with jobs and housing.

And at the former Kmart site, the New Nicollet project is already underway, transforming that space into housing, green space, and safer streets.

In just a few years, we'll be watching concerts on the riverfront. Riding bikes down Nicollet. Walking into a safety center with multiple services under one roof. We all love to complain about construction. But when you start seeing those cranes go up, that means the City is moving forward—and that's a City doing its job.

Final

These are important investments. But even this work has to be grounded. Focused. Disciplined. Because none of it matters if we don't get the basics right. Focusing on the fundamentals does not mean we stop caring about other important issues. It means we lean on partnerships and lead with the job in front of us and do it well. We prioritize the core responsibilities people count on every day: safe streets, stable housing, a city that works. And we deliver on them. Because when the foundation is strong, everything else we care about has a chance to succeed.

Right now, people across this country are asking a simple question: Does government work? This is where we answer it. Not with rhetoric, but with results. By getting serious and doing the work our constituents expect.

And yes, getting serious will mean having hard conversations heading into the budget about programs or investments that aren't working. It's time to let those go and focus on the services residents depend on.

We're going to need to make tough decisions, and some things we're going to have to stop doing. Because if people can't afford to live here, if they can't afford to start their business here, if they're not willing to invest in this city, we won't have the money to do the things we need to do. That can't be the story of Minneapolis.

Over this past year, we proved something. When it mattered most, this city showed up. Now, we need to continue showing up every day, because that's where trust is built. Not in moments of crisis, but in consistency. Doing the job, getting the basics right, day after day. Ultimately, this is about the future. The choices we make right now shape that future, and whether people stay, invest, and believe in our city.

Minneapolis doesn't need to rediscover who we are. We know who we are. We're a city that shows up.

Now we need to focus on being a city that gets serious about results. Serious about safety. Serious about housing, growth, and getting the basics right. And if we do that—consistently, relentlessly—we won't just get through tough moments. We'll build a city that works. We'll be a great city rising. A city of heroes. An example for the rest of the country to follow.

That's our Minneapolis and that's how we move forward.

Thank you.

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