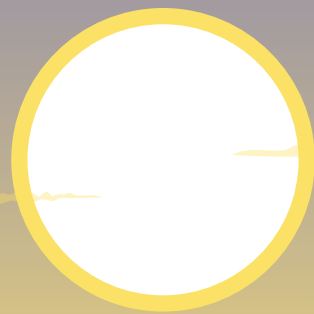


# State of the City 2024



Mayor Harvey L. Ward Jr.  
February 13, 2024

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## Mayor and City Commissioners:

Harvey Ward Jr. (mayor), Cynthia Moore Chestnut (mayor pro-tempore and at-large, seat B), Reina Saco (at-large, seat A), Desmon Duncan-Walker (district 1), Ed Book (district 2), Casey Willits (district 3), Bryan Eastman (district 4)

## Charter officers:

Cynthia W. Curry (city manager), Dan Nee (city attorney), Stephen Mhere (city auditor), Kristen Bryant (city clerk), Zeria Folston (director of equity and inclusion)



“I had to leave Gainesville to learn how lucky I was to ever be here at all. What I didn’t realize back then was that those years were the best of my life, and that I would never find friends and community like that which I found here in Gainesville. I have traveled the world over, and I know for certain what a truly special place Gainesville is. And I know that you all realize that, too.”

*-Punk rock icon and trans rights activist Laura Jane Grace upon accepting an invitation from Commissioner Bryan Eastman to receive a Key to the City on October 27, 2023*



# A Great Place to Live and Experience



## Wild Spaces, Public Places and Streets, Stations and Strong Foundations

The voter-approved Wild Spaces, Public Places half-cent sales tax provides funding to improve lands for conservation, wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation, and to operate and maintain parks and recreational facilities. The voter-approved Streets, Stations and Strong Foundations half-cent sales tax is dedicated to roads, fire stations, public facilities and affordable housing.



### Albert "Ray" Massey Park and H. Spurgeon Cherry Pool

This is Gainesville's first "boundless" or fully inclusive playground that allows access for all ages and abilities. Inspired by the adjacent Northwest Eighth Avenue Solar Walk public art installation, the brightly colored playground boasts a space-themed motif. Its largest play feature, the "Space Station," is designed with ramps and flat surfaces so that visitors requiring mobility supports, such as crutches or wheelchairs, may easily maneuver throughout the sprawling structure.



### Forest Park

Soon to be renamed Abby Wambach Park, this facility reopened in fall 2023 after a \$3.6 million renovation. It has newly turfed soccer fields, competition quality volleyball courts, two full-size basketball courts and six pickleball courts. Along with the athletic upgrades, the park was outfitted with improved lighting for night games, new bleachers for fans and new benches for teams. Bright blue shade structures, a stormwater management system and a dog wash station are among the new amenities.



### Tom Petty Park

This 22-acre park in northeast Gainesville recently received several significant upgrades. The renovation of Tom Petty Park began in 2022 with new tennis courts. Additional work includes drainage improvements, new turf, and irrigation for the three softball fields. Visitors may notice six new shade structures over the existing bleachers and upgraded ADA access, as well.

## A Very GNV Holiday Parade



More than 90 dance troupes, marching bands, floats and community groups made their way down University Avenue in the 2023 A Very GNV Holiday Parade, a celebration championed by Commissioner Cynthia Moore Chestnut and made possible through the generous contributions of local sponsors. It was the City of Gainesville's first parade in decades. Former Florida Gators head football coach Steve Spurrier appeared as grand marshal. The parade was one of several free public events hosted by the city to usher in the holiday season and marked the start of a new tradition.

## One Nation One Project GNV



One Nation One Project (ONOP) is a national initiative that began with Gainesville and eight other U.S. cities. The goal is to put a spotlight on the proven health benefits of arts participation on individuals and communities, all while uniting artists, local governments and community health providers.

In January 2022, Gainesville’s City Commission decided to use \$648,172 of the city’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in an effort to reduce youth gun violence through arts and culture. Community groups received grants of up to \$45,000 for projects including dance, theater and music. The final phase is a performance showcase set for summer 2024.

With leadership from the Office of the City Manager, ONOP is led by staff from Gainesville Fire Rescue (GFR) and Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (PRCA). Community partners include the University of Florida College of the Arts, SPARC352, Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Alachua County Public Schools, UF Health Shands Arts in Medicine and Alachua County.



## Gun Violence Prevention Summit



The City of Gainesville, under leadership of the full City Commission and through an effort championed by Mayor Harvey Ward and District 1 Commissioner Desmon Duncan-Walker, organized a two-day Gun Violence Prevention Summit titled, “Choose Peace: Gun Violence Must Cease.” The event drew an estimated 400 people to the Hilton UF Conference Center on Aug. 6–7, 2023 for discussions, breakout sessions and activities surrounding the search for solutions.



# An Equitable Community

## Affordable Housing Initiatives

The City of Gainesville’s vision for housing is a city where renters and owners, at every income and ability level, stage of life, race and ethnicity, have access to safe and affordable housing now and in the future.

In 2023, our Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) completed the rehabilitation or replacement of 31 homes. The city also provided 20 neighbors with down payment assistance, conducted 12 homebuyer education workshops, helped connect utilities for five neighbors and helped 18 stay in their homes through a program that prevents evictions.

The city awarded \$7.2 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to five affordable housing developers. Together, those developers will build 203 new affordable rental units and 17 new affordable single-family homes in Gainesville. In addition, the approval of the Weyerhaeuser proposal ended years of planning negotiations on new development for northwest Gainesville with a measure of environmental protection.



## \$500,000 Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant

In September 2023, the City of Gainesville and the Gainesville Housing Authority (GHA) received a \$500,000 Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The joint application was one of 14 chosen nationwide in a highly competitive process. It includes a “transformation plan” to support the revitalization of GHA’s Pine Meadows and Lake Terrace properties in east Gainesville near Fred Cone Park.

## Dylan Roberts Memorial Crosswalk



The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has completed construction and installation of a pedestrian-activated signal across East University Avenue (SR 26) between Northeast 26th Terrace and Southeast 26th Terrace. This new safety measure is a collaborative effort between FDOT and the City of Gainesville.

The crosswalk was prioritized after the death of four-year-old Dylan Roberts. On Oct. 27, 2021, Dylan was struck by a car while crossing East University Avenue on the way home from Fred Cone Park. In the years since, Dylan’s mother, Megan Durant, has led efforts to honor her son’s life and to promote safety for all pedestrians.

The city has worked with the Florida Legislature and Florida Department of Transportation to designate the crosswalk in Dylan’s memory and dual-name the nearest intersecting street, Northeast 26th Terrace, as “Dylan Roberts Road.”

## Language Access for Neighbors

### Bilingual Signage for City Parks

Forest Park is serving as the prototype for the city's first bilingual park signage, and will roll out soon as part of the newly completed renovation. Going forward, all new signs for parks and trails will have text in English and Spanish.

### Multilingual Translation Services

In an effort to become a more welcoming city, frontline workers were trained and given tools to help connect with our immigrant neighbors. Our language guide allows neighbors to identify which language they speak. Additionally, document translation services were made available to all city departments this year.



# East Gainesville Transformational Projects

## Eastside Health and Economic Development Initiative

This project will turn open land into a bustling clinic and RTS transit hub. This is a joint effort between UF Health, the City of Gainesville and Alachua County. The city and county have each given \$2.25 million in funding to help build the 10,000-square-foot clinic that is set to open in mid-2024.

The city is building a road to access the site, an eastside bus transfer station to make it easier for neighbors to travel smoothly to and from the area, and plan to bring Gainesville Fire Rescue's Community Resource Paramedicine Program to the location.



## Gainesville Technology Entrepreneurship Center (GTEC)

This business incubator is operated by the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA). It is a place where small businesses can learn and grow. The city plans to develop the full 13.6 acre site for future projects such as a grocery store or food hub, mixed-use office development or local shopping and retail.

## Sports Complex at Eighth Avenue and Waldo Road

With a completed feasibility study and planning funds earmarked, this project continues moving forward with an architectural and engineering design plan. The sports complex would transform the Martin Luther King Jr. Multipurpose Center and Citizens Field into a community hub for neighbors, athletics and economic activity. Residents are interested in using the 34-acres of city-owned property for sports and recreational facilities, community gathering space serving youth and seniors and greenspace.

## Cultural Arts Center

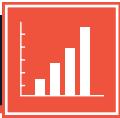
A cultural arts center is the subject of a current feasibility study and no site has been selected at this time. Funding is pending. The proposed center would bring the community together to enjoy performances, experience art and engage in meaningful conversations. These centers are also ideal locations to provide youth programming and host workshops and classes.



## Historic Heritage Trail



Now in the design phase, this project will create a physical system of signage and markers in the Fifth Avenue and Pleasant Street neighborhoods. The goal is to recognize the achievements of people, past and present, in the fields of business, medicine, arts, education and spirituality.



# Resilient Local Economy

## Downtown Achievement Award of Excellence

The International Downtown Association (IDA) recognized the City of Gainesville with the 2023 Downtown Achievement Award of Excellence. The award honors the city’s resourceful and innovative approach to revitalizing its historic downtown through work performed by the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA), the Department of Sustainable Development and the University of Florida.



## Downtown Strategic Plan (approved by City Commission in October 2022)

The Downtown Strategic Plan considered the past, present and future of downtown Gainesville and its surrounding neighborhoods, and strategically outlined opportunities, while preserving what makes downtown special, and move downtown forward. Responding to the community’s direction, the planning team created six overall themes that will shape the evolution of Downtown Gainesville. This project was approved by the city commission in 2022, and continues in 2023.



### Become a Destination

- ▶ Idea 1: Build investment around local strengths
- ▶ Idea 2: Shape downtown identity
- ▶ Idea 3: Create a downtown jewel



### Connect the Dots

- ▶ Idea 4: Balance the need for parking with the desire for a walkable, urban core
- ▶ Idea 5: Prioritize streets to meet city standards
- ▶ Idea 6: Activate the Sweetwater Corridor
- ▶ Idea 7: Create a Greenway Loop



### Strengthen the Relationship with Adjacent Neighborhoods

- ▶ Idea 8: Connect neighborhoods to downtown
- ▶ Idea 9: Establish transition areas



### Increase Housing Opportunities

- ▶ Idea 10: Address housing at scale
- ▶ Idea 11: Support affordable and mixed-income housing
- ▶ Idea 12: Facilitate market-rate housing



### Create a Supportive Local Business Environment

- ▶ Idea 13: Unlock real estate potential
- ▶ Idea 14: Increase direct small business assistance



### Maintain and Enhance Downtown

- ▶ Idea 15: Form a place-management organization
- ▶ Idea 16: Continue to build capacity



## Arts, Culture and Entertainment Districts

Beginning Jan. 1, 2024, open container restrictions that were in place before the pandemic returned for most of Gainesville. The only exceptions are two newly designated Arts, Culture and Entertainment (ACE) Districts where neighbors can sip and stroll. The ACE Districts permit open containers on sidewalks, public parks or other public rights-of-way between the hours of 8 a.m. and midnight daily.

The downtown ACE District encompasses a section roughly bordered by Northeast Second Avenue to the north, Northeast Third Street to the east, Southwest Sixth Street to the west and south to Depot Avenue. The downtown district includes Bo Diddley Plaza and Depot Park. (Both city-owned parks will continue to permit open containers daily from 8 a.m. to midnight.)

The Grove Street ACE District is an area between Northwest Second Street and Northwest Fourth Street, bordered to the north by Northwest 12th Avenue and to the south by Northwest Eighth Avenue.

## Office of Equity and Inclusion: Small Business Mentoring Program



The City of Gainesville Small Business Mentoring Program supports the increasing growth and development of participating small businesses by pairing them with more mature, experienced entrepreneurs. There were 24 companies in the 2023 program that were connected through these mentoring relationships; the connections and benefits of these partnerships may endure well beyond the duration of the 12-month program.



## More Sustainable Community

### Chief Climate Officer

Beginning with the selection of a chief climate officer in January 2023, the City of Gainesville is bringing together its climate initiatives and getting residents involved. One major project now underway is a climate action plan with goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change impacts.



### Electric Buses

The City of Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS) operates four battery-electric buses, with four more expected soon. The zero-emission buses each travel an estimated 150-200 miles per charge, connect to existing ChargePoint stations at RTS Headquarters, and can accommodate up to 38 seated passengers. In March 2023, the City of Gainesville received a \$1.2 million grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP to retire four diesel buses and replace them with four new battery-electric models).





## Road to Zero Waste

The City of Gainesville has set a goal to go zero waste by 2040 by supporting policies that dramatically reduce waste and encouraging residents to rethink waste material flows. By analyzing the status of our waste reduction and recycling, we are working to reduce waste and improve diversion opportunities.

The city has enacted several ordinances to help reach our zero waste goals:

- Limit the dispensing of single-use plastic items, such as condiments, plastic utensils and portion cups, unless they're specifically requested by the customer or are made available to the customers at self-serve stations
- Require recycle bins for the collection of bottles and cans, and place recycle bins next to garbage containers. The new changes impact fast-food establishments, convenience stores, supermarkets, bars and restaurants
- A ban on the intentional release of plastic glitter or confetti, as well as the intentional release of balloons



## “Best in Class” Neighbor Services

### PRCA Reaccreditation

In 2023, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (PRCA) earned reaccreditation with a 100 percent perfect score. The department achieved all 154 standards set by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Spanning 3,268 acres across the City of Gainesville, PRCA oversees 90 parks. The reaccreditation means the city has met rigorous standards set for management and administration of lands, facilities, resources, programs, safety and services.



### Gainesville Fire Rescue

On Nov. 16, 2023, Gainesville City Commissioners ratified changes to the city's three-year contracts with Gainesville Fire Rescue (GFR) public safety employees, hoping a new work schedule will lead to better work-life balance for current first responders and to an increase in future hires. This moves GFR to a unique 24/72 staffing model that will permit firefighters and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) to work a 24-hour shift followed by three consecutive days off. It has generated a lot of excitement in the field and is expected to help GFR become more competitive in recruitment and retention.





## Office of Communications and Marketing: City Website Awards

The City of Gainesville website was awarded both the 2023 Website of the Year and the 2023 People’s Choice Winner, in the 13th annual Digital Government Awards by Granicus, a leading provider of government experience software services and solutions. The website is user-friendly and fully compatible with mobile devices and tablets. It features improved accessibility for the visually impaired and the ability to translate its webpages into nine foreign languages. Data collected through user surveys show 73 percent of neighbors find information with ease.

## Downtown Refresh: City and Community Partners



Photo credit: Gainesville Rotary Club

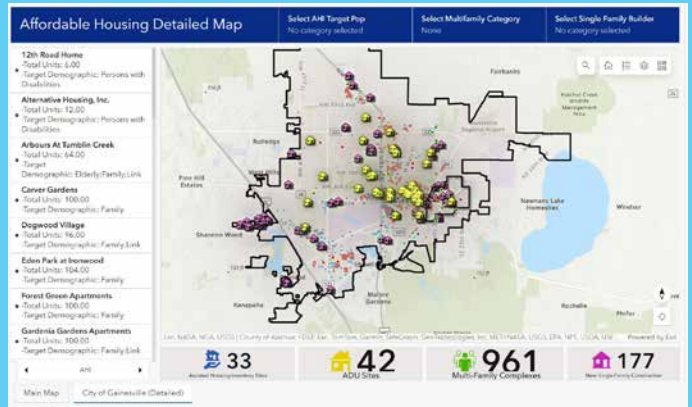


On Dec. 16, 2023, neighbors gathered for the Downtown Refresh. The planting, cleaning, sodding and general sprucing up of downtown Gainesville brought out dozens of volunteers—including many city staffers—who arrived early and worked hard. Major points of focus were City Hall Plaza and Sweetwater Branch Park. Community partners included Keep Alachua County Beautiful and the Rotary Club of Downtown Gainesville.

## Affordable Housing Interactive Map

In November 2023, the City of Gainesville launched a new online tool for the public to visualize previously unavailable housing information in neighborhoods across the community. The Affordable Housing Resources Interactive Map is designed as a quick and simple way to keep an eye on the city's housing data in real-time.

By accessing a user-friendly dashboard, visitors can review information collected from projects with start dates going back two years through the present day. The map provides a dynamic, changing view of current developments, funded housing programs and other resources that play a pivotal role in Gainesville's housing market.



## Gainesville on the Move Interactive Map

Incorporated in 1869, Gainesville is a diverse, modern city of more than 145,000 neighbors. The city is home to the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, along with robust and extensive health care resources including UF Health, HCA North Florida and Veterans Administration facilities. Our city core is home to a thriving arts and culture scene that leads many to think of us as Florida's cultural capital. We also have the Innovation District that hosts a growing startup and venture capital ecosystem.

The interactive map shows a few of the things our city government has been working on for the past several years to make Gainesville an even better place to live.

## \$32.4 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding



Bread of the Mighty Food Bank is one of the many organizations that received ARPA funding from the City of Gainesville

The City of Gainesville received \$32,408,804 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to be spent by Dec. 31, 2026. The funds are helping the community in areas that include affordable housing, public safety and homeless services.

- \$12.3 million for affordable housing
- \$4.9 million for community health services
- \$3.5 million for public safety
- \$1.4 million for community education
- \$1.7 million for homeless services
- \$1.1 million for community assistance programs



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*The City of Gainesville is sincerely grateful to Santa Fe College. We thank Santa Fe College, its leaders and the staff of the Blount Center for their partnership and support in presenting this year's State of the City Address.*

