

LOOKINGBACK; MOVING FORWARD

Thank you for being here. more optimistic about the path we are on for Easton.

Let me also say that I wouldn't be here without my family: my dedicated wife Pam who helps me through the tough times, my 97-year-old father, Sal Panto, Sr. children, grandchildren, brothers, sister and cousins, nieces and nephews.

Today, my State of the City is one of celebration and gratitude. Sure, 2024 brought its plethora of challenges. But it was also a year of opportunity, innovation and perseverance and growth.

This was reported at that time in the local newspapers

“Easton Mayor Phil Mitman will announce his plan for the 2008 city budget later this week. Easton has been financially strapped for some time. A budget forecast shows the city faces a 4 million dollar deficit by 2010.”

The State of our City could be summed up in one word --- fragile.

Fragile – as we navigated the continued uncertainty of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression in 2008 and 2009.

Fragile - in 2008 we were on the brink of Act 47.

Fragile –Later as we navigated through a global pandemic.

Fragile – in the face of a looming \$11 million budget shortfall caused by the pandemic; and,

Fragile – because of a host of civic issues left unaddressed.

Today, Easton is ready!

Ready to continue the renaissance that we started. Ready to rebuild. And ready to continue solving the tough problems we face together, every single day!

Easton was a great 17th and 18th century city. One of our residents signed the Declaration of Independence and we were the site of the third public reading of that document that became our Birth Certificate; we were heavily involved in the war for independence; we were the site of many treaties with the Native Americans; we were on the forefront of the Industrial Revolution.

In 1900 we were the largest of the three cities in the Valley.

Our history tells a story of great entrepreneurship and vision. Our buildings and institutions tell a story of great wealth and investment. Like so many other cities in the northeast, we did not adapt so well to the 20th century suffering though decades of downsizing and disinvestment and the flight to the suburbs.

Finance

Every year our goal is to prepare a budget that has no increases to other residents of Easton. More than 85% of our budget is personnel costs.

Revenues were up in earned income tax and non-resident earned income tax as well as increases in rental licensing, business tax, parking and casino revenue which are stabilizing since COVID. Our pension investments are, I should say WERE, and or the 2025 budget the Administration recommended, and Council eliminated, the non-

resident earned income tax commonly referred to as the commuter tax. And our City wouldn't be here without our City workers and the labor partners that represent them.

Our City Administrator Mr. Luis Campos, is entering his ninth year with the us. In addition to his regular duties the CA is also directly responsible for Human Resources, Finance and Budgeting, Information Technology and Public Communication.

Luis and the entire senior staff are a credit to the city.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize my senior managers. A big thank you to our residents and businesses who stayed the course even in the bad years.

ADMINISTRATION

Human Resources

The Administration has maintained full employment throughout 2024 for its 275 positions. Vacancies were filled, and no consideration was given to holding positions vacant as a result of budgetary pressures as in the past.

Like most municipalities across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, retirements will add pressure to services as long-time employees retire and new employees take their place.

In 2024 Human Resources on boarded 46 new hires. Both Police and Fire Departments have maintained full compliment and we have had

the addition of new positions including augmenting fire platoon strength to 16FF to ease the transition of retirement and injuries.

The Fire Department has approximately 34% of its firefighters eligible for retirement.

The Administration successfully settled on a four-year contract with the Police Union. The new contract provided for increased wages that would enable the police department to compete with other regional agencies.

At the writing of this report the Administration is still in negotiations with the IAFF Local 713 Fire Union, with the aspiration of settling prior to a mid-July Arbitration date. In 2024 three grievances were received and no grievances turned into an arbitration case.

Information Technology

- **The city continues to invest and improve city IT operations. Prior to 2008 there was not one person on staff in charge of the I. Today there are two. Very little technology was used. There was one email for the entire city.**
- **Upgrades were completed to the datacenter at the Police Department with the deployment of a virtualized environment for better performance, scalability and improve IT operations.**
- **Wireless Access Points were upgraded at City Hall to make it more reliable and secure.**

- **New AV equipment was installed for the conference rooms at City Hall for better online collaboration. For the third street garage the IT department installed new security cameras.**

Public Communication

The Administration continues its effort to increase the City's communication with our residents. We have over 25,000 followers on social media. While traditional methods of communication are rapidly disappearing, the increase in electronic communication has been welcomed, but not for our senior citizens.

The City Administrators 2025 Goals are:

- 1. Maintain a balanced budget and communicate issues to the Mayor on a timely basis.**
- 2. work with finance and controller to improve financial management**
- 3. Begin negotiations for new AFSCME contract**
- 4. Negotiate a new lease agreement with the Easton Water Authority or sell Easton's water assets for the benefit of the residents.**
- 5. Augment communications via direct mail Newsletter informing residents of municipal services and important changes affecting the community.**
- 6. have digital message boards installed in each neighborhood to keep residents informed of ongoing issues.**

POLICE

The mantra of our Administration, back to the campaign of 2007, was “Clean and Safe with fiscal responsibility”. Tonight, I am pleased to report that, unlike other cities, Easton saw our violent crime rates go down again last year, for the 18th year in a row. Thanks to our police officers our city is safe and we reduced violent crimes each of the last 18 years.

Although UCR Part I Crimes increased by 14.93% this was driven up primarily to non-violent auto theft which increased 116.67%. UCR Part II Crimes decreased by 11.16%, driven mostly by a decrease in weapon offenses and drug offenses and total calls for service decreased by 2.55%. There were no homicides in 2024.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Lawlessness will not rule the day in our city. We Are a nation of laws, not of men. I want to thank our police officers for the job they do every day to keep our residents and visitors safe.

In 2024, the Easton Police Department continued further education and training of its officers.

This training and our police conduct following the policies of the department led to the department being declared a Premier Certified Police Department having been accredited five times in a row.

In 2024, the Easton Police Department continued to identify and removed approximately fifty illegal graffiti locations throughout the city by utilizing the graffiti removal program.

In 2024, the Easton Police Department also renewed its commitment to the city-wide surveillance system by purchasing nine new license plate recognition camera systems.

FIRE

I am very proud to say that Easton maintains a fully paid professional fire department that answers calls for emergency services within 2 minutes and 4 seconds. For 2024, I am happy to report that we did not have any civilian casualties.

Last year was another year of saving lives and property. In 2024 the fire department year responded to 2265 calls for service. They also responded to a multitude of other emergencies including 33 building fires, 38 cooking related fires, 530 Emergency Medical Services calls, the balance of responses were for a variety of fire alarms, hazardous materials, motor vehicle accidents and public service.

They responded 22 times to assist our neighboring Fire Departments with mutual aid 1 in West Easton 11 in Wilson, 1 in Forks Township , 5 in Palmer Township 2 in Williams Township, 1 in Bethlehem Township and 1 Phillipsburg NJ . The Easton Fire department is really our fire and rescue department.

Our Fire Prevention program covered all city schools that interacted with ninety-two classes and a total of 2,002 students and 170 Teachers. We also held fire extinguisher training classes to train employees of several businesses in the city.

In 2024 the Fire Department accomplished the following:

- 1. Trained our firefighters and took delivery of our New Pierce Engine,**
- 2. They expanded our Pre-fire plan program.**
- 3. Hired five new Firefighters that completed the academy in June 2024.**
- 4. Upgraded our Fire Reporting Software.**
- 5. We were awarded a FEMA Fire Prevention and Safety grant (\$98,873.00) for Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors (to distribute to homeowners 2025)**
- 6. We launched our Community Connect program for residents**

The Fire Department's goals for 2025 include the following:

Hire and train four new Firefighters at the Allentown Fire Academy.

Reduce Overtime.

Lieutenant and Captain testing (March 2025).

Improve Department Technology with new software to aid in responses).

Take delivery of our 2025 Pierce Tiller Ladder Truck sometime next month.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is often said that population growth is the judge of a city's success. All the things you do to build a city ultimately boil down to whether people want to live there or not. The most recent Census data released in May reflects that our population is increasing ---- for the first time in 50 years. When we took office In 2008 Easton had a population of just over 26,000 and today Easton has a population of 30,506 and growing --- and when I leave office in 2027 we will top 33,000. Still less than the 1950 mark of 35,000 but this growth proves that people and families *want to live in Easton*.

Today Economic Development in Easton has topped \$1 Billion.

This year we witnessed the completion of the Commodore and WaterMark, and Seville developments, the commencement of construction of the Marquis, the Confluence and the Great Square Hotel and several others that we are currently working on which will be announced in a few weeks. We are excited to make the announcement but for several reasons I can't do it today.

Yes, today Easton is greater, better and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us in 2008. We hit the ground running, and as Governor Shapiro says “we get stuff done.” Dedicated city employees of this city make it all possible. Our economy is

recovering, and our stores and restaurants are full. Our children have improved parks and recreation programs. Our State Theater is thriving and our Crayola Experience is attracting more visitors to our city. Our restaurants are fully booked and Eastonians are back to work. In the next few months, we will announce not one but two new attractions, and possibly three, to our city. I am proud of our achievements, and I want to thank all of you who worked so hard to get us to this moment today. We are an international working-class small community.

In 2008 Easton unemployment rate was in the double digits. Our current unemployment rate is 3.3% below the current Lehigh Valley rate of 3.5% and lower than our November 2024 rate of 3.7%.

And last but not least, our state partners. Governor Shapiro. You see him on stage, you see him delivering his vision for our Commonwealth. You see him visiting our city. You are seeing real leadership in this governor. Thank you, Governor Shapiro. He's fighting for us in Harrisburg as well as our senior Legislators Senator Lisa Boscola and Representative Bob Freeman; and our county officials County Executive Lamont McClure: Thank you for your partnership and helping us make Easton a great city again.

PUBLIC WORKS

2024 saw the completion of:

- the Wood Avenue Corridor Rehabilitation**
- the City's Active Transportation Plan**
- the Cattell Street Corridor Safety Improvements Project**

- Intersection Realignment and Re-Timing Improvements for: 13th & Bushkill, 4th & Northampton, Larry Holmes Drive & Northampton, Larry Holmes Drive & 3rd , Bushkill, Snyder & 3rd, 7th & Northampton, Centre Square • Completion of (3) MS4 Installations at Cheston School, County Parking Lots, and Mauch Chunk Park
- Ongoing Environmental work for the Easton Iron and Metal Site
- Continued work on the City's Climate Action Plan Initiative including adoption of the Climate Mitigation Plan Addendum and a 2050 Net Zero carbon emissions goal.
- the Northampton Street Decorative Lighting Phase to 13th Street
- Coordination of the Bushkill Creek 3 dam removals in the City of Easton
- Coordination with Easton Area School District for improvements to Vanderveer Park
- Completion of Concept Study for a new downtown bicycle pump track and mountain bike facility located in Hackett Park
- Reconstruction and upgrade of the Hackett Park hardball infield
- Coordination of Improvements for Centennial Park
- Coordination of Improvements for West Ward pocket parks
- Coordination of Nesquehoning Memorial Park Committee and park improvements design
- Installation of Citywide in-situ sanitary and storm system improvements
- Wastewater Treatment Plant Capital Projects

- 200 Street Tree Plantings

PLANNING AND CODES

Thanks to our Economic Development Plan development -- redevelopment has continued throughout the city and across our four neighborhood.

The department received and processed 1,421 construction permits, an increase of almost 4%.

The continued development and redevelopment over the past year resulted in a total of 3,706 construction inspections in 2024. A minor rise in property transfers resulting in 388 buyer notification inspection requests, a 23.6% increase over 2023. Other applications processed include 90 Certificate of Appropriateness, 350 Zoning, 63 Zoning Appeals, zero Property Maintenance appeals, and seven Building Code appeals.

We took the helm of Easton in a challenging time in our city and nation. Violent crime was up. Violent activity and shootings were prevalent throughout the city; street walkers walked the streets downtown; ---- people had a negative outlook on Easton. Visitors weren't coming. Restaurants opened and closed. Things weren't good for Easton.

Today, I am proud to stand here and speak to you about not only our accomplishments of the past year, but also what we are mostly looking forward to the future.

This is not the time to slow down..... It's time to double down.

Ladies and gentlemen, when we look back on our accomplishments of the year and years gone by, and as we aspire to achieve even greater goals in the years to come;

We've taken the historic American Rescue Plan funds from the Biden-Haris administration, and we are putting them to work for Easton. Based on the Mayor's Affordable Housing Task Force we budgeted \$4 million for affordable housing and \$1.5 million in a residential façade program.

Rise to the challenge of addressing chronic homelessness. It's a national issue and the federal government must provide the funding, especially for mental health.

Mental health and addiction are often at the core of homelessness, behavioral health, mental health, and treatment for substance use disorders are all services that are supposed to be provided by county government.

In 2025 we will rise to build more affordable housing to bring down the costs of housing and rise up against the urge to say "no" because change is scary.

Rising to meet the expectations of all our neighborhoods.

Rise to confront the climate crisis.

Rise above doubters to deliver real solutions to the most intractable problems we face.

Rise up against those that speak ill of our city Don't be afraid to confront them with your positive experiences.

Real change comes from community, so I knew my first and most important job as mayor was to build the team Easton deserves. That team needs to be recognized. It is a team of professionals in their respective areas. They are not political appointments of people that will be loyal to me. They are people who are loyal... to Easton.

And we have the resources, the resolve, and the responsibility to make it even stronger.

As we look to the year ahead, our administration is focused on building a green and growing city for everyone.

Economic and Community Development

When the “Easton Redevelopment Authority” was created nearly 70 years ago, its purpose was singular: to clear the way for new development, even if that meant displacing thousands of working class. Today its mission is to create jobs and expand the tax base and address the housing crisis. **Gov. Shapiro slide**

Over the last two decades, Easton saw the largest building boom in generations:

cranes in the sky and jobs on the ground.

But that growth wasn't harnessed for the benefit of all our communities, especially our neighborhoods so we developed the motto to “de-

velop the whole town not just the downtown! Our Southside neighborhood was awarded a 10-year designation as a Blueprint Community and the committee meets every month to plan for stabilization of the neighborhood and the expansion of locally owned business in neighborhood services. One of its goals is to bring Pride of place to SS residents. The West Ward is seeing an upgrade in all of their parks and the planning for youth and senior center so young and old don't have to recreate in the streets and our seniors can socialize in a face-to-face environment.

Easton's economy continues to be fundamentally strong. We continue to see growth in all sectors of the economy. Easton's great advantages include steady population growth, a real economy that provides positive outcomes for middle- and working-class residents.

City Council will be focused later this year on the community's economic future as the city begins work on a comprehensive plan slide to identify the community's priorities for economic vitality, neighborhood preservation and land use. This is your opportunity to help shape Easton's future. What is important to you? Your children? Your grandchildren? This planning process is important and asks the question, "What do we want Easton to become in the next ten years.

Festivals Have been important to success of the city. People from the suburbs come to the city have a good day and sees a different city that is alive and well.

First, we must decide what we want our city to be and then we must go out and make that dream a reality. We must pay particular attention to our zoning, so we avoid conflict like the warehouse at 13th Street which is allowed by right.

The bar is raised incredibly high. But so is the level of inspiration.

Improving our city has been hard work.

I'm proud to report not only on our work and our success from the past year, but our path forward as we welcome 2025.

Eighteen years ago, Easton was a place with hundreds of dilapidated structures.

It was a place with a downtown that had better days. It was a city that needed to re-invest in our waterfront, our parks, our roads and infrastructure and our recreation.

It was a city that needed:

(1) to prepare financially for a rainy day. Easton has never been in such a financially sound position, and we always assumed that our rainy day would never come... and then COVID hit. We are not at our goal yet but we should be by the time I leave office.

(2) upgrade infrastructure so we have a safe city

I'm proud we've tackled these challenges and more.

In eighteen years, we have secured more than \$100M in grant funding, because of our amazing relationships with our U.S. Senators, state rep and state senator.

Just as good and affordable housing is necessary for a community, the space for our families to play and grow is vital.

Easton's story is still evolving. Our focus should be on the future.

How will our children and grandchildren talk about their city?

I hope our grandchildren talk of a place where they feel joy and pride, where they have deep connections, where they found someone or something special, and where they have created a life.

I'm proud to have been a small part of our progress over these past 18 years and I am looking forward to the next two.

One of the notable aspects of being mayor is becoming aware of some of the city's hardest moments. I can absolutely assure you that Easton's heart is full of courage and love. From the police officer who saved victim of a gunshot wound, even though he knew he was a wanted man, to the firefighter who reversed an overdose, to the teacher who intervened in a dangerous situation, from the community organizer who helped a family avoid homelessness to the business owner who poured everything she had into a new venture,

We are building a catalytic future for Easton that not only embraces our growth but seizes the opportunity to cement our identity as the center for tourism, dining, entertainment and culture in our region.

The future we are building — together — is deliberate. It's intentional and positions our city for even greater success.

While other urban centers are losing population, Easton continues to defy trends, outpacing state growth.

While my administration may not see the opening of the West Ward Community Center, we will lay the foundation, identify the funding and start construction for this transformational neighborhood project.

As we grow as a city, we know the number of people who are most vulnerable is also growing.

We know the emergency shelter system must increase capacity to meet immediate needs. But when Safe Harbor was founded, we needed it to be more than shelter --- we needed it to have GED classes; job skill training; job interview prep. Skills that enable individuals to provide for themselves.

We're building a lot --- Roads, water and sewer lines, gas lines, bridges, canal locks, housing, parks, and more. Updating infrastructure is inconvenient ---but it must be done to make our city safe.

Easton is on a path that is catalytic, driving excitement and energy into our communities about our history and gold-medal future as an entertainment, dining and cultural powerhouse.

As we embrace this future and welcome more neighbors and visitors today, tomorrow and in 10 years, I know we will be proud of the decisions we made.

We will be proud of the partnerships we built. And we will be proud of the initiative we took to ensure Easton thrives for another century.

While there is so much violence and hatred that threatens to turn us against one another, there is so much opportunity here at home that brings us together. We all want the same basic things for ourselves, for our children and for our neighbors. I want to ask the residents of Easton to stand together. To stand up and take collective action that will make our city a cleaner, safer, more compassionate place. And when we've done that together, there is no stopping what Easton can become!

Our 2025 Goals include:

Hooper House

Hologram Zoo

Larry Holmes Hall of Fame

Nurture Nature Planetarium

Lehigh Waterfront and Skatepark

America 250th and Lafayette 200th

Thank you.

Hologram Zoo

Hooper House

Lehigh Waterfront and skatepark

Nurture Nature Planeta

Lary Holmes Hall of Fame slides

America 250/Lafayette200

Thank You