



Office of the Mayor
316 North Park Avenue, Room 322
Helena, MT 59623

helenamt.gov

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2026 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS FROM MAYOR EMILY DEAN

Good evening and thank you for being here. It is an honor to stand before you as Mayor and share the State of our City.

This year, Helena celebrates 145 years as an incorporated city. Eight years before Montana achieved statehood, the people of Helena understood something critical: that a growing community requires shared responsibility, strong institutions, and a commitment to serving one another.

In the late nineteenth century, Helena recognized the increasing complexity of city life and stepped up to move the community forward. Like Helena then, today we are prepared to meet our challenges head on. We are clear-eyed about what lies ahead, with an orientation to leveraging opportunities for the benefit of all Helenans and focusing on providing the best services possible for our citizens.

Helena is moving forward with purpose. Over the past year, our city government has focused on what matters most: keeping our community safe, maintaining essential services, planning responsibly for sustainable growth, and investing in the people who serve our citizens every day.

In late 2024, we adopted a comprehensive Strategic Plan shaped by community priorities and guided by long-term thinking. In 2025, we began to turn this plan into action.

We passed a balanced budget that was fiscally responsible and focused on strategic plan aligned priorities. This budget included investments in employee retention through meaningful cost-of-living adjustments and stable benefits, reinforcing our commitment to being an employer of choice. Great public services depend on great public employees.

Thanks to strong fiscal management, staff expertise, and coordinated planning, the City secured nearly \$6 million in grant funding, including \$4.5 million in new grants. These dollars help deliver critical transportation and infrastructure projects, reduce the burden on local taxpayers, improve safety, and beautify our streetscapes.

Helena continues to grow and we are working to facilitate that growth thoughtfully and sustainably. In 2025 alone, the Community Development Department issued more than **3,500 building permits** and completed over **6,300 inspections**. Major projects came online, including the **Montana Heritage Center**, new commercial investments including **Tractor Supply**, and the **Great West Engineering** headquarters.

We also made meaningful progress on housing. Through the City's first Affordable Housing Trust Fund loan project at Twin Creek Apartments, we permitted **72 new affordable housing units**, we funded capacity building with direct service providers who support the most vulnerable in our community through the Helena Area Community Foundation, and collaborated with our non-profit partners to create a

registration program for Extreme Cold Weather Temporary Shelters. These efforts will ensure Helena remains a place where people of all incomes can live and thrive.

We took major steps to prepare for the future by adopting the Helena Forward Land Use Plan and are launching a comprehensive rewrite of zoning and subdivision regulations, so growth supports livable neighborhoods, infrastructure capacity, and long-term sustainability.

Public safety remains one of our highest priorities. Our Municipal Court, City Attorney, Police Department, 911 Communications Center, and Fire Department work together every day to protect our community, support victims of crime, and uphold the law.

This year, the Municipal Court improved service to the public by participating in **trauma-informed court incubator training**. The City Attorney's Office introduced a **municipal code infractions enforcement system** for those matters such as ADA violations that had previously gone unaddressed because the Code didn't support enforcement.

Our Police Department responded to nearly **28,000 calls for service**, welcomed a new K-9, and published its first annual report. The 911 Communications Center achieved a **99% quality assurance score** while transitioning to next-generation systems that will improve emergency response countywide. The Fire Department responded to **approximately 5,000 incidents** and continued heavy fire prevention and inspection work.

We are especially proud of the progress made toward constructing Fire Station 3, an investment supported by you, the voters, that will provide a state-of-the-art training facility and improve response times while enhancing safety as Helena continues to grow.

This summer and fall, it was hard to go anywhere in Helena without seeing crews at work. Across the city, infrastructure improvements moved forward in visible and meaningful ways.

Public Works completed the **Tenmile Watershed diversion structure projects**, rebuilt critical water treatment filters, and produced more than 2 billion gallons of drinking water. At our wastewater facilities, energy-saving upgrades will significantly reduce long-term operating costs. Solid Waste served 176,000 customers, diverted tens of thousands of tons of material from the landfill, and expanded sustainability education throughout the community.

Transportation crews delivered tangible upgrades across the city, installing new sidewalks and ADA curb ramps, repairing more than 1,400 potholes, resurfacing streets, striping miles of roadway, and improving traffic safety features. Capital Transit maintained **99% customer satisfaction** and a **95% on-time rate**, even while navigating staffing challenges. Parking Services modernized parking technology and improved facilities, including the Jackson Street Garage while Fleet Services maintained **over 700 vehicles and pieces of equipment** that keep city operations running every day.

Over the past year, the City of Helena also led the formation of the **Greater Helena Area Metropolitan Planning Organization**, a federally required transportation planning entity. Working with regional partners and the public, the MPO adopted its first **Public Participation Plan and Unified Work Plan** and started the development of a new **Long-Range Transportation Plan**. This work strengthens mobility, safety, and multi-modal connectivity across the broader Helena area. I'm proud to chair the MPO as we plan for transportation systems that serve people well today and prepare us for the future.

Helena's quality of life is enriched by our parks, trails, open lands, and community facilities, and in 2025, these spaces continued to shine. The City **hosted over 5,000 park and field rentals, cared for 175 acres of turf and more than 20 miles of trails**, and restored historic assets like the **Fire Tower and the Beattie Park locomotive**. The Civic Center welcomed **nearly 100,000 attendees** while our pools, ice rink, and youth

programs served tens of thousands of residents. At Bill Roberts Golf Course, we saw a record **57,000 rounds of golf**, added solar power, and supported programs for veterans, students, and athletes of all abilities.

Our Community Facilities Department managed **44 citywide projects**, improving energy efficiency, accessibility, and long-term durability in City buildings, while preparing for major construction in the coming year.

Behind the scenes, the City continued to modernize how we do business, launching a **new online utility billing system and making significant technology and policy upgrades** across finance, human resources, records management, and public engagement. These improvements strengthen transparency, accountability, customer service, and fiscal stewardship. For the 37th consecutive year, Helena earned national recognition for financial reporting excellence, and once again received clean audit results.

Looking ahead to 2026, our focus is clear. Guided by our strategic priorities, we will deliver high-quality City services, invest in critical infrastructure, ensure growth, and support livable neighborhoods. We will prioritize partnerships that improve our quality of life, including accessible parks and recreational opportunities, vibrant small businesses, and thriving arts and cultural experiences. We will modernize policies and systems to make City government more efficient, transparent, and responsive, while expanding opportunities for community engagement.

Our City's strength comes from its people, the dedicated employees who serve every day, the volunteers and boards who give their time and expertise, and the residents who care deeply about their neighborhoods. By working together, we are turning vision into action, making Helena a place where families thrive, businesses grow, and people of all ages can enjoy a safe, connected, and beautiful community.

The State of our City is strong and our future is full of possibility. With continued focus, collaboration, and innovation, we are building a Helena that is not just a special place to live today but an exceptional city for generations to come. Let's embrace this opportunity, move forward together, and make 2026 a year of purpose and progress.

Thank you.