FROM THE FRONT

"For the vast majority of life's necessities you rely blindly on the help of other experts, whose own knowledge is also limited to a tiny field of expertise."
YUVAL NOAH HARARI SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND

Yale makes biggest vow to city: $230 million in 7 years

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funding cuts, even as the University tightens its budget in anticipation of a slated increase in the tax on wealthy universities' endowment returns.

"Yale, like New Haven, is facing uncertainty," McInnis said, "but uncertainty is actually a prerequisite for making a commitment to our community."

She added that the University is committing to a greater payout to the city because "we don't know what will come but we do know that we want to go through it together."

The development followed months of negotiations between the University and its host city.

Alexandra Daum, Yale's associate vice president for New Haven affairs and University properties, and Jack Callahan '80, the former senior vice president for operations, led negotiations on Yale's side. Henry Fernandez LAW '94 represented New Haven. All three stood beside Elicker and McInnis at the City Hall press conference, and Daum spoke extensively about additional initiatives in the new deal.

Elicker framed the deal as part of a new stage of the city's centuries-long relationship with Yale.

The University has provided a voluntary contribution to the municipal budget since 1990 and substantially increased it in a 2021 agreement overseen by Elicker and former University President Peter Salovey GRD '83 '84 '86.

"That commitment came from the top with the leadership of President Peter Salovey, and as you have heard today, it's a commitment that continues with President Maurie McInnis," Elicker said before thanking the president.

The agreement inked Thursday eliminates the $8 million drop in Yale's payment that was expected for fiscal year 2027 — a decrease that was built into the 2021 deal to kickstart negotiations on its successor. The new deal amends the payment for that year and schedules a series of payments through fiscal year 2033.

According to a letter sent by McInnis to Elicker and Tyisha Walker-Myers, the president of the Board of Alders, the new plan includes a "simplified method" for calculating the University's voluntary contribution.

Yale's annual payment will begin with a lump sum of $25,545,000 for fiscal year 2027, which will increase by 2.5 percent per year through 2031. Payments in fiscal years 2031 through 2033 will remain mostly level, with increases of around $200,000 a year caused by the fire services payment agreement agreed to in 1990.

"As far as we are aware, this represents the largest voluntary payment, both annually and collectively, by any university to a municipality across the country," Elicker said.

Fernandez, the mayor's negotiator, said in an interview before the agreement was unveiled that if Yale and New Haven reached a "good" updated deal, it would "be better than all the deals that any universities in this country have ever done with their host city."

In January, leaders of Yale's unions, along with city leaders like Walker-Myers, held a rally and called for the University to increase its annual payment to $110 million.

Thursday's agreement preserves two components of the 2021 deal. For every property Yale takes off the city's tax rolls for academic use, the University continues to make payments equivalent to full property taxes for three years before decreasing this payment by 10 percent each year. Yale will also maintain its financial commitment to the Center for Inclusive Growth.

The University has also agreed to make a one-time $8 million payment to New Haven for this fiscal year to make up for a decades-old accounting gimmick. Elicker said that around 2005, "in order to cover a budget gap," New Haven accounted for revenue from one of Yale's payments in the previous year's budget. Ever since, Elicker said, Yale has made an August payment that the city counted in the prior year's revenue.

Elicker said that "from an accounting perspective," this is "legitimate."

Now, thanks to the extra $8 million from the University, Yale's payments will "appropriately align with the city's fiscal year to address this historical issue," Elicker said. The $8 million is part of the seven-year $232.7 million total.

The mayor said that his team raised the issue during the 2021 negotiations, and added that "this time around, Yale has been very generously willing to give us an $8 million payment so that we can correct that."

Alongside the 2021 deal, Yale and New Haven announced a plan to convert the section of High Street between Elm and Chapel Streets into a pedestrian-friendly walkway. That plan was paused last February amid financial uncertainty at Yale, according to the New Haven Independent, but on Friday, Daum said that the University and the city will continue to "work together" on projects to convert "certain streets that feel like they would be more appropriately oriented towards pedestrians, as opposed to cars."

High Street remains a likely candidate, per McInnis' letter, as does Cedar Street between York Street and Congress Avenue.

Another "key area of focus" is housing availability and affordability, Daum said. Yale "recognizes" Connecticut's affordable housing crisis, Daum added, and "we want to explore how we can help."

"We're going to look at vacant or underutilized University land and figure out how it can contribute to increased housing supply in New Haven," Daum said.

Yale will also create a fund, awarded over three years, for "targeted, strategic donations" to community nonprofits, according to Daum.

"Our partnership is a lot more than the money," she said in an interview.

McInnis' letter outlines two additional new initiatives: working groups composed of University and city officials aimed at sharing "best practices in the fields of information technology, economic development and long-term planning," and planned investments by Yale in local food insecurity-focused nonprofits.

The president, who introduced herself as a "historian," grounded her remarks in the 300-year financial relationship between Yale and its host city.



Will Qian / Staff Photographer
University President Maurie McInnis and Mayor Justin Elicker on Friday announced a plan for Yale to increase its annual contribution to the city budget to $33.6 million by 2033 — a substantial increase from a 2021 deal.

She pointed out that Yale only moved to New Haven because the town offered it £2,000 — more than Saybrook and Hartford — along with eight acres of land in the early 18th century.

"It's not an exaggeration to say that Yale wouldn't be here were it not for the generosity of the denizens of this city," McInnis said.

In his remarks, Elicker thanked parts of the New Haven community that he said made the new agreement possible. He pointed specifically to the local UNITE HERE unions, which represent several groups of Yale employees; New Haven Rising, the unions' politically powerful community organization; the Board of Alders; the city's legislative delegation and Fernandez. Only two alders were present at the press conference: Richard Furlow, the body's majority leader, and Christine Kim '99, the new Ward 7 alder who was sworn in on Wednesday.

The week before the Yale deal was announced, Elicker unveiled his proposed budget for fiscal year 2026, which included a 4.01 property percent tax increase. He indicated then that a voluntary contribution increase might allow the city to "alleviate some more of that burden."

That budget is "in the alders' hands now," he said at the press conference about the town-gown agreement. "Ultimately we will have, thanks to Yale, an additional $5 million to work with. And if that were put all towards the tax increase, the tax increase would go from 4 percent to 2.5 percent."

The mayor added, however, that Yale's payment is helping fund "a lot overall."

Negotiations over the new payment plan began in September, Fernandez said, and involved nine meetings between city and University officials. Fernandez previously said that "every face to face meeting has been me and Jack," referring to Callahan.

Contact **ELIJAH HUREWITZ-RAVITCH** *at elijah.hurewitz-ravitch@yale.edu.*

Recycling plant grinds glass into cement alternative

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"This isn't chemistry that we're inventing," Chris Cotulio, a material sustainability specialist at O&G Industries — a construction company that has worked with Urban Mining Industries — said during the tour. "The ancient Romans and Greeks used volcanic ash as a pozzolan in their structures over 2,000 years ago, and a lot of them are still standing because it makes more durable concrete. So this is just a modern twist, using a post-consumer recyclable as a vehicle for that silicon dioxide."

During the tour, Cotulio and Urban Mining Industries CEO Louis Grasso Jr., who invented Pozzotive, walked Yale members through the process of creating the finished product.

The facility receives post-consumer glass from nearby material recovery facilities that collect refuse from ordinary recycling bins. Upon arrival, the material is put outside in foul-smelling mounds of muddy grit. Given the imperfect recycling systems, contamination from organic matter, plastics and metals isn't uncommon.

The raw recycled glass is cleaned mechanically in a tumbler that Grasso called a "dryer" — which he said differs from most plants' chemically intensive cleaning processes.

"Everything is really done correctly and transparently, so no chemicals or water goes through the dryer," Grasso told the News. "The dryer tumbles the glass on itself, and it breaks off the paper labels, and it breaks off the dried organics as it goes through the tumbler or dryer."

Grasso founded the company over two decades ago and has since taken on large projects like the more-than-$3 billion JPMorgan Chase high-rise in Manhattan, which used 52,000 cubic yards of pozzolan-substituted concrete to build floors, according to the Pozzotive website.

This project and more were covered in a tour led by Cotulio and Grasso. In the factory control room, Cotulio showed the visitors the systems and operations screen, where a schematic of the factory's operations is constantly monitored for changes in operations and efficiency.

"What we're seeing is an example of where the sustainable option is the better option," Ayushi Khan ENV '24, a postgraduate associate at the Yale Center for Industrial Ecology, said. "So this is a great, amazing example of why recycling can be so lucrative sometimes, and the better option sometimes. And this is easy to scale."

Natural forces like motion, gravity and density are utilized by the plant to process this raw material. Harmful batteries are then removed by giant magnets. Powerful fans blow out the lightweight plastics while leaving the denser glass pieces behind.

Mechanical grinding, akin to a geode tumbler, breaks down the glass pieces into the plant's final product: pozzolan.

Pozzolan can be substituted for new cement at rates of 15 to 50 percent, according to Cotulio, though Grasso has experimented with blends containing up to 70 percent substitution. Due to the chemical composition of cement, a baseline proportion of cement is required to mix with water and make concrete, so full replacement with pozzolan is not possible.

The remainder of the cement is usually supplemented with fly ash, which is a coal-burning byproduct, or slag, a remnant of iron smelting. However, a partial replacement of traditional cement already significantly reduces carbon emissions, Cotulio said.

Recycling a ton of glass back into glass bottles saves roughly 166 kilograms of carbon dioxide, Cotulio said in his tour presentation. By comparison, recycling glass into concrete saves 980 kilograms — nearly a ton of carbon emissions.

According to Cotulio, benefits of Pozzotive's cement include increased resistance to chloride — useful for when sidewalks are salted in the winter — and that it shrinks less due to temperature fluctuations compared to traditional concrete, which can lead to structural cracks.

"It was also pretty amazing that the product itself is cost parity with regular cement, which means it's the same cost," Alfonso Panis SOM '26, who was also on the tour, said. "It's really just the supply chain, at least to my mind, that's the bottleneck, like the raw material sourcing."

The Urban Mining Industries facility is located at 105 Breault Road in Beacon Falls.

Contact **MICHELE SO** *at michelle.so@yale.edu.*





Michelle So / Contributing Photographer
Raw building materials are highly carbon-intensive. The News joined a tour of a Connecticut facility that is helping Yale lower its carbon emissions by making a cement substitute out of recycled glass.