

Walking the Talk

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'Don't be fooled by the calendar. There are only as many days in the year as you make use of.'

Charles Richards (1879 - 1956), Politician

April 10th marked 100 days of this County administration. It has been a time of change, and, in my opinion, a time of progress. This is my report to the citizens of Douglas County on this first 100 days.

In the field of technology, changes have been made to the County's web site to hopefully make it easier for our residents to access pertinent information.

- News & Information web pages have been created for each Commission District, and these pages include roadway projects, voting precincts, property information, elected official contact information, maps, and more. Each District News & Information web page has its unique URL for direct accessibility.
- We now have two web interfaces where property owners can enter their home address and find information on legislative districts, community facilities, tax information, comparative sales, and much more.
- The Tax Commissioner's web page allows credit card payments, and on-line Homestead Exemption and Property Tax Return applications.
- Citizens now have one-click access to submit their concerns, complaints and notifications for road conditions & potholes; street signs & traffic signals; trash & noise; animal control; and other general concerns.
- A long-needed new telephone system has just been installed that has capabilities and capacity to better serve our residents.
- A Mondopad has been installed in the Commissioners' Board Room to enable webinars, interactive presentations, and information sharing. Work Sessions from the Board Room are now being recorded with videos posted on the web site and social media within 24 hours.

Open Government is a priority, and in addition to the Work Session tapings, the Board of Commissioners instituted once-a-month night legislative meetings in March.

- Department Directors now submit weekly reports to the County Administrator that are available to the Public. District Commissioners are now more directly in touch with the Department Directors by the creation of administrative committees, on which two Commissioners serve.
- Following the example set by previous administrations, I now host a monthly informative show on dctv23 called 'Clearly', the purpose of which is to make government more understandable to our residents.
- I am hosting quarterly 'Walking the Talk' listening sessions at our libraries and festivals for one-on-one conversations with our citizens. Commissioner Mitchell continues his bi-monthly 'Coffee and Conversation', and Commissioners Robinson, Mulcare, and Guider continue their town hall meetings to listen to what our residents have to say.

We want to interact with our citizens. We want to celebrate your accomplishments, so we are pleased to issue Proclamations and Resolutions during our Commission meetings to recognize you. Please let us know how we can get to know you and your needs better.

This administration inherited a financially strong organization, and the current Board of Commissioners has pledged that we will continue being fiscally conservative and responsible.

- After all bills were paid and future obligations encumbered, the County had an unrestricted fund balance of approximately \$14.2 million at the beginning of 2017. Department Heads kept expenses down, and are working with another lean budget this year. A healthy reserve fund is necessary for emergency expenses. We must not be caught unprepared.
- Our responsible financial position was recently reaffirmed by our strong credit ratings. The result was a low interest rate and high participation for our SPLOST bond sale. These ratings are the envy of other Georgia counties.

It is important to our citizens and to our employees that the transition from one administration to another continue as seamlessly as possible. This ensures stability of government. Projects that began prior to this year are continuing.

- The Bleakley RV Building renovation is underway and we hope that some County administrative departments will be there before the end of 2017. Once they move, there will be renovations and security enhancements constructed in the main Courthouse. The planning for this is continuing.
- The new Animal Services building is open at Deer Lick Park. Due to the County's strong fiscal policies, this building was paid for as it was being constructed, and no debt was incurred. Despite the challenges, this badly needed facility will be a credit to our County for many years to come.
- The Lee Road Extension project continues to move along.
- The Northeast Extension of the Chattahoochee Hill Country Regional Trail System is continuing, and the design of the segment from Boundary Waters to Sweetwater Creek State Park is now underway.



- The 2016 SPLOST referendum is going to fund major improvements.
 - Roads will be paved, and intersections improved.
 - Fire apparatus will be replaced on a regular schedule.
 - Parks will be renovated.
 - A new Senior Center will be constructed.
 - A desperately needed digital radio system for public safety will be purchased.

During this first 100 days, we prioritized the project list, and we employed the services of a SPLOST Program Manager to ensure that the approved projects are completed on time and on budget. The complete list is on the 2016 SPLOST Program page of the County web site.

Economic development must continue, and our outreach through the Development Authority must continue unabated.

- Z Gallerie, a premier lifestyle brand in fashion décor, will create 115 new jobs and invest \$3.7 million in our County over the next two years as it creates an East coast distribution facility and customer service center in Lithia Springs.
- The Keurig cold-brew project building, which seemed to have been dealt a death blow when the company was sold, may have new life in a partnership with Anheuser-Busch that will bring jobs to their empty facility.
- We will continue to support the ongoing strategic plan study underway by Avalanche Consulting for the Development Authority with the purpose of increasing economic prosperity and development in the County.
- The Southwest Thornton Activity Center Study is a deep dive into the transportation, economic development, and land use components of that area. The Board of Commissioners is working with the City of Douglasville and the Development Authority to help map the future of this area, and to develop a growth plan with a diverse mixture of business and residential uses.

We also started original initiatives during this first 100 days.

- Believing that transportation options are limited for many of our residents, we have embarked on an ambitious plan for small bus service to begin early 2018. We are looking to start service with two routes - a central circulator route and a Northside route. The buses will accommodate a driver, 12 ambulatory passengers, and 2 wheelchair passengers. Future expansion most likely will include a route serving Thornton Road and Riverside Parkway. We are applying for Federal and State grants to help with the program and equipment costs, and we will update you as the planning continues.
- We want to ensure that our voice is being heard in Atlanta and Washington, DC. To that end, the new position of External Affairs Director was created and filled, and she is already working to ensure that local priorities are known to our State and Federal officials. It is our goal that funding sources be identified at the State and National level for many local projects.
- It is always difficult to collect taxes, but over \$4.5 million in delinquent taxes for the School System, cities, and County have been collected in this first 100-day period. We also created and filled the position of Chief Tax Administrator whose major responsibility is ensuring that delinquent taxes are paid.
- Our Sheriff's Office has instituted the Sheriff's Community Outreach Program and Education Division (SCOPE), to help close the divide between law enforcement and the community.

One hundred days is only space on the calendar, but I am taking this opportunity to report to our residents that we are about your business in a positive and growing manner. As we begin the next hundred days, and future days ahead, you will be seeing progress, including the following.

- 30 miles of roads will be reconstructed and resurfaced in 2017 under GDOT's Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant program with matching local funds.
- An additional 16 miles of roads will be reconstructed and resurfaced in 2017 using SPLOST funds.
- The Public Safety digital radio system will be purchased and operational.
- Construction will begin on intersection improvements at Stewarts Mill Road and Yancey Road.
- The trails at the Dog River Park will open.
- The soccer fields at Boundary Waters will be lighted.
- Our Fire/EMS Department will order a ladder truck, an ambulance, an engine, a new Fire Safety Education House, and two staff vehicles, and the Toughbook computers in all our fire engines and rescues will be replaced.
- Much-needed renovations will begin at Fire Station No. 3 on Kilroy Lane.

The first 100 days were amazing, and I believe we will continue to see Douglas County moving forward.

I stand before you as the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, but I stand before you only as a leader. The hard work of this first 100 days has been borne by the employees of Douglas County. Their dedication and hard work has made these accomplishments happen, and their efforts are appreciated.

I also appreciate the partnership of the other County elected officials, City of Douglasville officials, the Douglas County School Board, our local legislative delegation, and community leaders as we have gone through this transition and moved into the direction we have taken.

There will be challenges and opportunities ahead, but know that we will face them with the best interests of Douglas County citizens in mind.

Thank you, our citizens, for your support, and for your confidence in what we are doing.

Walking the Talk with You,

Romona

The 100-Day Report was first presented April 24 to an audience in the Courthouse Atrium.

