

The following are prepared remarks for Chairman Dr. Romona Jackson Jones' State of the County speech to the general public at the Douglas County Courthouse Atrium on Wednesday, April 12, 2018.

Good afternoon to my fellow Commissioners, our County Administrator Mark Teal, County Attorney Ken Bernard, Board of Commission administrative staff, Department heads and employees, special guests, my fellow citizens, those who are present in the chambers of this courthouse and those who may be watching us on television, or on the Internet. Today, it is both my privilege and honor to stand before you to deliver my first Annual State of the County Address.

I would like to say that I am thankful for the opportunity to work with and lead our county forward with such an amazing Board of Commissioners. At this time it is my pleasure to recognize the Douglas County Board of Commissioners.

Meet our Vice Chairman/ District 2 Commissioner Kelly Robinson, District 1 Commissioner Henry Mitchell 111, District 3 Commissioner Mike Mulcare, District 4 Commissioner Ann Jones Guider.

I want to thank these incredible elected officials for their time, talent remarkable vision and insights with leading Douglas County forward.

Today, I stand before you in this grand room among incredible leaders who have in one way or another contributed to the giant footprint of success in Douglas County. Overall, we had a fantastic year in 2017, and I appreciate the confidence the community has placed in my leadership ability to move Douglas County forward.

My charge this afternoon is to recapitulate the conditions under which we all labored last year and spend time talking with you about current economic and environmental conditions in which we find ourselves as we plan for the forthcoming years. Together we are working hard to build a

better today, and a promising future and our achievements are a testament to teamwork, collaboration and building harmonious relationships.

(Reflections)

Douglas County is a diverse community with a business-friendly climate. Access to the busiest airport in the world is 30 minutes away from our doorsteps. Our professional services grew by 59%, and advanced manufacturing increased by 40% from 2011-2016, and we noticed remarkable growth in commercial, industrial and residential in 2017.

Our infrastructure advantages include power, gas, fiber, and water. We are in the midst of an exciting transformation with the building and renovation of restaurants, retail stores, hotels and road expansions flourishing throughout.

Our quality of life is exceptional with over 8,000 acres of dedicated outdoor space including Sweetwater Creek State Park and numerous city and county parks to fit all needs. Parks and Recreation introduced its first Newsletter in July 2017. This newsletter highlights park events, facility locations and program listings for the public to see. Boundary Waters Aquatic Center revenues have increased by \$57,000 annually for the last several years, and May 2017 was the highest revenue month in the history of the Aquatic Center. Revenue totals exceeded \$41,000.

We have superb libraries. Our educational system is top notch and the 2017 four year graduation rate for Douglas County School System is 87%, beating the state average by over 6%, and all five high schools have a magnet program including the International Baccalaureate program. Young

professionals' population accounts for 27.2% of Douglas County total population and 38% of the young professionals have at least a bachelor's degree.

Our water supply is among the best in the nation, and there is good news to report Douglas County water users; the Georgia Environmental Protection Division has lifted the level 1 Drought response due to vigorous winter and fall precipitation. Though having the level 1 Drought response lifted is good news; however, we do encourage you to continue to please be conservative.

(Our County's Financial Position)

Our economy is healthy, and we are thriving! Unemployment is at a 25 year low. Foreclosures are declining, and our home prices are above the pre-recession level. Population growth is the highest since 2002. In 2017, we experienced a 5.5 percent new growth in the digest and this is a ten year high.

Last year, our Tax Commissioner garnered over 7 million dollars in delinquent taxes going far back as 2007. The Board of Commissioners cut the tax rate by 4.43% and reduced the millage rate by 0.499% in 2017.

Our setback is a set-up for our comeback and this administration stepped up and tackled an inherited \$8.5 million shortfall and successfully balanced the 2018 budget without increasing taxes and there was no interruption to county services. Our financial position is robust, and our credit position is

very strong. We continue to sustain the highest AA2 bond rating comparable to counties our size and our reserve fund is healthy.

(Our County's Economic Development Update)

Douglas County is open for business and committed to Work Force Development initiatives to building relationships to foster economic growth and transformative advancements. Last year, we formulated a long-time needed Economic development strategic plan to design and shape our future vitality and prosperity. Today we are in the process of laying the groundwork to build pillars to celebrate the community, invest with intention and cultivate talent. We are also working to develop business success to enhance our image and competitive position.

Our small businesses are the heartbeat of our community. The Douglasville-Douglas County Chamber is doing an extraordinary job engaging our small businesses. We will continue to refine and benchmark our processes and regulations to support the sustainability of homegrown character, prosperity, community wellbeing, enhanced job creation, local decision making and keeping dollars within our local community.

Our economic development capital investments totaled 3.3 billion dollars in 2017, and this was another historical accomplishment. Our very own Executive Director for the Development Authority Chris Pumphrey worked 25 projects, announced five new industry locations with 210 new jobs last year. Data Centers are quietly transforming Douglas County. Most recently, Las Vegas-based global technology company "Switch" broke new

ground here in Douglas County. Switch is building a 1 million square foot campus called “The Keep.” This \$2.5 Billion investment is the most significant single capital investment in Georgia’s history.

Economic Development is the pivotal point of progress in Douglas County. Strategic planning efforts underway include the Sweetwater Master Plan completed by Kimberly Horn and the sewer study for Capps Ferry Road. Fox Hall also recently announced their plan to move forward with completion of the Westin Hotel, Villas and Conference Center at the South Douglas Resort in a recent special called meeting with the Board of Commissioners and the Douglas County Development Authority.

Lights! Camera! Action! These are words you should be familiar with when it comes to movies. Hundreds of movies and television programs are being produced in Douglas County. Our film trail is part of the complete package of tourism offerings, including 2000 acres of parkland and 2500 acres at Sweetwater Creek State Park. The nonprofit group, Film L.A., called Georgia the Number 1 filming location in the world. Film and television projects delivered a \$9.5 billion economic impact in 2017 to the state of Georgia.

(Public Safety)

Public safety is critical to our community. Our Emergency Management Agency, Fire Department, E-911 Operations Center, Department of Transportation, Sheriff's Office, Communications Director and other first

responders do a fantastic job tackling fires and natural disasters. With severe weather impacting our region such as hurricanes, tornadoes and record snowfall, we were able to increase and enhance our communication efforts utilizing social media to offer up to the minute updates.

Last year was a hectic year, and our first responders have the battle scars and letters of commendations to prove it. We are taking pride in best practice approaches with fully cross-trained fire-EMT staff, utilizing sophisticated advance life support equipment and continuous rigorous disaster preparedness exercises.

Douglas County should be proud after FEMA recently announced a major accomplishment. Douglas County has undertaken a series of meaningful activities to protect its citizens from losses caused by flooding and has significantly exceeded the requirements for National Flood Insurance Program participation and effective floodplain management improving to a Class 7 rating. This federal program enables property owners in participating communities to purchase insurance as a protection against flood losses.

Law enforcement is essential to a thriving community. Our crime rates have dropped slightly in 2017; however, this administration continues to invest in necessary resources to keep our residents safe. We stay abreast of advancements that drive efficiency such as body cameras and we consistently look for ways to minimize risk with proactive measures and our 2018 budget will fund the hiring of four Sheriff Deputies to patrol and protect the Fairplay area of Douglas County.

Efficient recordkeeping contributes to an effective system, and our Coroner office has taken the necessary steps to implement a seamless, automated process to track and maintain vital information.

It's also worth noting, that Wellstar Douglas Hospital has received its official Georgia Certificate of Need for the development of Level II Neonatal Intensive Care unit services and I have received word that the hospital's Women's Center has already begun making changes to incorporate this important enhancement.

Our judicial system aligns with best practices and 21st-century principles. Our Circuit Accountability Courts opened the first mental court in the history of Douglas County last year. Also, our District Attorney's office and Domestic Violence Task Force opened the first ever Child Advocacy center location, which is temporarily being operated in the new Sheriff building. Superior Court Judge Beau McClain is leading the effort to help combat the homeless housing problem. Judge McClain sought and obtained approval to have transitional housing available for homeless individuals in a community called Sanctuary Village.

Our Superior Court Clerk's office implemented a partial payment plan system that gives defendants several months to pay their fines and switched to a new online payment vendor saving the citizens over 4% on convenience fees. Technology is moving by leaps and bounds in our judicial system and all Deeds going back to 1871 are now available online. For the first time in history, the Board of Commissioners allocated funding in the 2018 budget in the amount of \$125,000 to advance Children's Mental Health Services in Douglas County.

This administration is encouraged by all the progress in Douglas County.

We opened the new Animal Shelter in April 2017. Dog River Trails opened in June of 2017. The Tax and Tag Offices, Appraisal Department, Geographic Information Systems Department and the Fleet Management team will be moving into new offices at the end of April-May this year. A full-blown security system will be installed in the Courthouse this year as well.

Our Department of Transportation Director is working to move the Lee Road Project along. The Northeast Extension of the Chattahoochee Hill Country Regional Trail is continuing, and the design of the segment from Boundary Waters to Sweetwater Creek State Park is now underway. Road widening and installation of turning lanes are currently in progress at Yancey and Stewart Mills Road. Good traffic flow makes a good day for all of us. The Georgia Department of Transportation added ramp meters at freeway entrance ramps along Interstate 20, and once the system is activated, we will experience a new era of innovation in Douglas County. Another example of transformational change is being shown along Thornton Road, and the large overhead traffic flow signage is gaining lots of favorable feedback from our residents.

Our SPLOST pennies are at work. A desperately needed digital radio system has been vetted and planned for activation in 2019. Our SPLOST funds and commitment to the betterment of transportation infrastructure, Fire/ EMS resources and Park and Recreation enhanced amenities. Upcoming projects include sidewalks; a new community center at Boundary

Waters, a Senior Center in Lithia Springs and an additional fire station to be built near Douglas Hill and Thornton Road in the upcoming years.

We now have access to online local grocery shopping services with doorstep delivery services in Douglas County, called Instacart.com. Our future is bright. The Tax Commissioner has placed a new automated Tag renewal Kiosk in the Court House and is working towards obtaining another one to place in District 4. We continue to find innovative ways to ease the burden of unnecessary travel for our citizens. Our External Affairs Director is currently working with our State Legislative Delegation to potentially secure a driver's license renewal location in Douglas County soon.

We have the responsibility for making the right decision. This year the Mayor and I are excited about the County Administrator and City Manager working in collaboration on a combined ten-year comprehensive plan for Douglasville and Douglas County.

We welcome ground-breaking opportunities, and we are championing things that have never been done before in Douglas County. Our newly established External Affairs Department works very closely with our State and Federal Legislative Delegation to oversee and monitor the Board of Commissioners legislative priorities as it pertains to specific House and Senate bills. The Board of Commissioners adopted its first formal state and federal legislative agenda. We are taking pride in public engagement activities such Behavioral Health, Mental Health, Arts, Culture, and Humanities. Hard work pays off, and Douglas County was recently recognized in Washington DC by U.S. Representative David Scott for

leading our efforts on Behavioral Health Awareness. We are already ahead of schedule by embracing the Arts, because the latest economic development trends reveal big companies like Amazon look favorably on those who espouse Arts, Culture, and Humanities.

We continually position ourselves to compete and meet the demand for excellence, and we are working towards building a base of volunteers. Our External Affairs Director is leading the way for obtaining certification to become an official Keep America Beautiful/Keep Douglas County Beautiful affiliate. Our tenacity and determination to clear all the rigorous hurdles associated with getting our certification strengthen our capacity to address litter and beautify the gateways in Douglas County.

(Future Planning) As we go forward, we will continue to utilize calculated strategic priorities to foster

- economic growth and vitality
- efficient organization performance
- environmental stewardship
- enriched public safety
- public health and well-being
- enhanced cultural and recreational opportunities
- and active and inclusive civic engagement.

We exceeded expectations in our first year, and we have come to terms there is no room for second place.

Transportation infrastructure is an ongoing task. We will continue our efforts of paving roads, fixing potholes and repairing worn down road

shoulders. For the first time in our history, Douglas County will be host Georgia Department of Transportation for a site visit in September of this year. The purpose of this meeting is to assemble with GDOT officials to discuss and execute a plan going forward for the upkeep of state roads in our county.

Our mission, vision, and values far surpass mediocrity. We strive to be builders of families, of neighborhoods, of communities and build bridges – not walls. As we go forward, I believe the next significant steps for this administration is to execute a tactical plan to address unfinished subdivisions and plats throughout the county. We will continue to galvanize our opportunities to discuss our formal housing study, embrace energy efficient cost savings and foster long-term capital planning initiatives. We all have to work together to strike the right balance to pilot an intermodal (15 passenger) fixed shuttle route system if it is God's will. Our nation has an Opioid Crisis at hand, and Douglas County is not exempt, and this administration will have to wrap our minds around addressing this pressing issue.

We are consistently competing for the top spot. After holding bronze status for eight consecutive years in the Atlanta Regional Commission Green Communities program, we advanced to Silver Status in January of 2018. The Board of Commissioners hosted our inaugural Internship program in 2017, and we are looking forward to working with our millennial's to prepare them to take the future reins of local government.

We appreciate our seniors and host monthly televised birthday parties. Also, I currently serve on the Atlanta Regional Commission's Aging committee and work hard to secure grant funding to accommodate our

senior needs. The Atlanta Regional Commission recently announced that Douglas County would be receiving a \$55,000 grant for meals on wheels program this year.

We are blazing the trail of success, and our profile is being raised through local newspaper and magazine outlets, DCTV 23, Douglas County Happenings Facebook page, twitter, Georgia Trend and Georgia Forward Young Game Changers editorials. I host a quarterly “Walking The Talk listening session at our libraries and festivals for one-on-one conversations with our citizens. Also, I host a bi-monthly televised show called “Clearly.”

Transparency is part of my platform, and this administration understands my conviction regarding an open government. I released our annual report card in the Chapel Hill News and Views April Edition as promised and hope you will take the time to review our results. The County’s website is Celebrate-Douglas-County.com, and there is a reason this open line of communication exists. It’s about our story-and the State of our County-one of celebration-celebrating what is good and positive about our County, and working together to make it better.

Finally, this year brings optimism, and we should seize the moment. We have an enormous stake in the outcome of the direction of our county, and the destiny lies in our hands. As a United States Veteran and as a daughter of a Korean War Paratrooper, I know as long as we stand on confidence and character, we can achieve the impossible. Our journey is not about whether we are democrat or republican, our journey is about doing what is right and standing for the rights and dignity of all citizens in

Douglas County. This county is great because we all work together to unify our strengths and leverage opportunities for our future generations. As long as we uphold our ethical and moral values and advocate for our citizens trust in God, we will not waiver from our devotion in making Douglas County the county of excellence in the state of Georgia.

We will move from Good to Great!

Douglas County will do well!

And the best is yet to come as we envision, engage and energize the state of our Great County.

Thank you and May God continue to bless us.