

STATE OF THE CITY – April 11, 2017

CHATTAHOOCHEE HILLS GEORGIA

Before I start talking about what the City has done over the course of the past year, I want to talk about our history for a few moments – about why we became a city in the first place.

When the South Fulton Parkway opened in what is now our City of Chattahoochee Hills, the likelihood of development in this area moved from being some far-off future possibility to a ‘coming soon’ reality. The road was designed and built, after all, to spur economic development. In the past 30 years, we’ve seen that development spread all around and past our community – in particular, the area around the Parkway to our east has changed from nothing but woods to a sea of subdivisions and warehouses. They now surround us to the north, south, east, and west.

While that activity slowed for a few years in the downturn, it’s back with a vengeance now. One look at the huge 1,000,000-sf Walmart distribution warehouse on the Parkway (where work is about to start on a 1,000,000-sf addition) proves the point. It has already added hundreds of semis a day to the Parkway, and those numbers will only increase. And even our local “Palmetto International Airport” is being redeveloped, as a warehouse district with almost 5,000,000-sf of buildings going up there as we speak. And that’s just one of 5 huge new projects going up in Palmetto.

Huge new subdivisions are springing up just to our south in Coweta County, to our West in Douglas and Carrollton, and soon, even in our City on properties approved by Fulton County long before they became a part of our City.

The Atlanta Regional Commission’s projections tell us that the Atlanta region will add 2.5 million people by 2040. As the largest and closest (and prettiest) area of open land left in the metro area, some of those people will be coming here, like it or not – and even a small percentage will have an enormous potential impact. This sort of growth has happened in every rural town around us, and not one of them has managed to maintain their rural character.

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And we need to keep in mind that Georgia is a property rights state – there's just no way to tell people that they can't develop their land, particularly when that land was bought specifically to be developed under a zoning program which allowed it (as well over half of the land in Chatt Hills was). There is no way to just say, 'no development' – it's not right, it's not fair, and there's no way that a little city with a budget of around \$3 million a year can fight those legal battles (which both Georgia law and history show us the city would lose anyway). We can't afford it, and it won't work anyway. And we NEED some development – good, quality development and the tax revenues that it will bring – to have any hope of keeping up our many miles of roads in the long term.

We are so incredibly blessed that our unique zoning gives us the real possibility of an outcome that is different from EVERY other city around us, and around Atlanta. We have designed and implemented a zoning plan that communicates with potential developers – to make sure that they understand what we want. To ensure and demand that their interests are compatible with, and support, our zoning and policies, and our vision of what we want our community to be. We have to remember that this is the main reason that we became a city – to *control and shape* the development that is inevitably going to come this way. To make it more livable, less disruptive – better. To keep as much of the city as it is as is possible.

The people of THIS community have come together many, many times over the past 30 years to try to figure out ways to make all of that happen – to protect the rural character that has kept the families who have been here forever here (and which continues to attract newcomers, as it always has). From the South Fulton Scenic Byways planning process in 1998, to Fulton County's efforts that led to the Chattahoochee Hill Country Community Guidelines and then the Chattahoochee Hill County Zoning Overlay in the early 2000's; to our own Comprehensive planning process 7 years ago and the update we did last year which underpin our zoning, the community has weighed in on and shaped the plans for Chattahoochee Hills again and again, with literally hundreds of you and your neighbors participating in the process over the course of time.

The outcome of those conversations has *always* been the same: The community wants to concentrate new development onto a small portion of our lands; to

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buffer it so that it doesn't ruin our Scenic Byways, and to keep the rest of the City as rural as possible. That's what our zoning does. And it's working. The development that we have so far, and that we need to have going forward, isn't the big warehouses that bring little in tax revenues, but lots of trucks. The one new development that we have isn't even visible from our scenic byways, and it creates a large share of our local tax revenues on tiny bit of our land. We'd need much higher tax rates to maintain our current level of services without those revenues. Any new development under our zoning will follow that pattern, and add tax revenues and local services in the least impactful way possible.

I'd like to move along now and talk about the City's operations and services, and the crew that's getting the work done. From what you hear from a small but vocal minority, you might think that things are not going well in the city, but I'm here to tell you that we are in better shape than we have ever been.

The arc of our finances – from being over \$1 million in debt and buried under loans just six years ago, to our current million plus dollar positive fund balance and no debt, is simply amazing. That was my primary focus from the start – ensuring first the survival of the city, then its prosperity. And the team here in front of you has made it work! We are still a long road away from having a budget that can cover all the money that we would need to keep our roads in perfect shape, but we've made huge progress on the day-to-day requirements of running the City safely, efficiently and effectively.

We are now able to put our surplus to work, stretching that money to significantly improve services and infrastructure in the City.

Our biggest effort late this past year was spending nearly \$600,000 on new equipment to repair and keep our gravel roads in appropriate condition – a new motor grader, front end loader, and dump truck – all of which have now been dele. Some progress has already been made, and while the storms last week of set us back a bit, the Public Works crew is working hard to make sure that all of our gravel roads are in tiptop shape by summer. One thing I was happy to see is that the roads they had already done (pulling ditches, adding gravel, regrading and reprofiling) handled the bad rains well. That's the level of quality we can expect on ALL of our gravel roads going forward.

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And with the passage of the TSPLOST referendum, the City will get another \$3,000,000 to be spent on critical road maintenance over the course of the next 5 years. We did some serious paving last year, and will be doubling down this year and next – you'll see a lot more paving, a lot of road striping – just a general improvement in the pace of our physical plant maintenance activities. We need more to keep up (full repaving of just one mile of road costs over \$300,000, and we have almost 90 miles of paved roads!), but it's a good start.

Robbie and I have also been working hard on the 2017/2018 budget, and as some of you have heard in our workshops, we will be asking the council to approve several important new initiatives:

One of the most important addresses an issue that we hear about often – emergency medical transport. We are at the far end of the Rural Metro service district, and I know we all personally know stories where a long, long wait for a distant ambulance has cost family members or friends' precious moments in getting to the hospital in a time of need. While Chief Brett and I have been working at our respective levels with the County and our neighboring cities to improve Rural Metro's level of service in Chattahoochee Hills (and it IS improving), it's still not good enough.

With that in mind, we're asking the Council to approve the purchase of an emergency transport vehicle (officially, a 'Transport-Capable Medical Response Unit'), with all the associated outfitting and equipment, including the three additional full-time Paramedics that will be required to staff and operate that vehicle. This will NOT replace Rural Metro as our primary carrier – that's not something that we can legally do. What it DOES is allow our paramedics the option of transporting patients directly to the hospital themselves if someone's life is at stake, rather than waiting for a Rural Metro ambulance. That is a HUGE addition to the services that our City provides its citizens, and we're going to push to get it implemented as soon as possible.

We are also adding two more people to the Public Works and Parks & Rec team – that will allow us to have independent teams, so that we can be grading somewhere in the city at the same time as rights-of-way are being cut elsewhere. And, as we've discussed recently in our work sessions, we are increasing the pay

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levels at the lower end of the scale in the public works department, so that we can get and retain better, more skilled folks there.

There's a lot more which you will see as we review the budget in coming months, but I won't keep you here all night – you get the idea – major upgrades! Some of those additional items and expenses will be paid for by our generally better finances; some from better efficiencies in other areas, and some from the folks from outside of the city who are using our parks. We're still running very conservatively, but the good decisions we've made over the past six years, along with new homes in the community and an improving economy, are giving us the latitude to do more, and to do it better.

On to the people who are getting the work done.

I would argue that we now have the best staff the City has ever had – real pros in every area, all of whom really love this city, and who work their bottoms off for it.

- Chief Stoney Mathis has brought a new level of professionalism to our police Department. That department has participated in several large drug busts in the community with our local, state and federal partners in the past year – helping to make us all safer. We're fully staffed again, and providing the community policing that our City expects.
- Darold Wendlandt has brought amazing energy and skills to our Public Works team. Everything he and his crew have touched is better than it was before, and while they have a huge amount of deferred maintenance to recover, Darold's energy and enthusiasm make me sure that they WILL get it done, and done right.
- Greg Brett is back to running the fire department full time, working in every way that he can to make all of us safer. When there is an emergency in town (or ANY need), Greg is running toward it – doesn't matter if he's off, or busy – he is there. And he's taken the lead on the very important emergency transport project.
- Mike Morton is probably the busiest planner in the County – running all of the City's planning and permitting functions, and busier than a one-armed

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wallpaper-hanger. He really understands the nuances of our zoning, and knows how to implement our plan better than anyone I can imagine.

- City Clerk Dana Wicher has picked up extra responsibilities, and is now also doing an excellent job of covering our finance function in addition to her work supporting the Council and the citizens.
- Shannon and Amber have swapped seats – Amber is now on patrol in the PD, Shannon is already doing a fantastic job at the Court Clerk spot.
- And Robbie Rokovitz is *leading*. He's brought such an elevated level of experience to this job, and is providing real servant-leadership to this awesome team, and to the Council he reports to. He's also focused on improving communication, which you can see in the regular updates on the website, and the press releases we are now doing.
- And of course, all of the other folks on the team – our community-focused police officers, our professional court staff, our amazing firefighters, our public works and parks crew, our administrators, our awesome City Attorney, our Judge, and solicitor – are all doing their part to get the job done professionally, efficiently, and economically.

I want to thank all of you (looking at the staff in the room) – you are the people who are actually getting the job done, and you're doing it efficiently and *well*, in an environment of continual economically enforced scarcity.

I also want to call out the huge amount of work done by our large community of volunteers:

First, our Commissions:

- The Planning and Zoning commission, who thoughtfully work on the tough issues inherent in balancing rural character and development; and the balance between the need for standards with the respect for everyone's property and privacy rights.
- The Parks Commission, which has done so much work, adding miles of trails in Cochran Mill Park, improving Rico Park, and getting us grant after grant – including one which will once again connect the east and west sides of Cochran Mill Park through the historic bridge, and who are preparing for a public planning process for Hutcheson Ferry Park and Beaver House, to

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make them as good in their unique ways as Rico Park and Cochran Mill already are.

- Community Brickworks and its many volunteers, who run the library, the foodbank, the T-ball program and so much more.
- And there are so many more. All of our churches and their community outreach. All of the other groups that work to provide services and programming. The folks that work to make sure our children have good educational opportunities. All of the folks who pitch in when sometime goes wrong – when a tree is down in a neighbor’s yard, or a neighbor is lonely or hungry. There are so many more – too many to mention by name!

It seems like everyone in the community finds some way to give back (for so many people in this community, you have found several ways to give back at the same time!) To all of you, on behalf of the City, I want to say that you are appreciated and we are grateful. Thank You!

I also really want to thank this City Council – the people who are working hard with me to help make all of this good stuff happen. We’ve really come together after a tough and divisive year last year. We don’t always agree, but we respect each other, and all always have the best interest of the WHOLE city at heart. You continue to do the demanding work; passing good budgets, doing the research, and looking at the whole picture to make the right decisions on behalf of the city as a whole – good strategic decisions that will ensure a bright future for all of us, and for our children and grandchildren.

Now I have a request for everyone here.

The first part of last year was tough. Divisive. It’s gotten much better since then, but to the extent that there is anything lingering; now is the time to fully come back together as a community. I ‘get’ that there is huge diversity in Chattahoochee Hills; that we have different points of view, backgrounds, experiences, incomes, ages, races, lifestyles... But I also understand that that diversity is not just between various parts of town – Rico and Goodes, or Serenbe

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and the Crossroads. There's also huge diversity within those neighborhoods – within Rico itself; or within Crossroads; or Serenbe; or Goodes; in every area of town. Sure, some of that diversity may be defined by where you live, but it's also defined where you go to church, or what you do for a living, or whatever. Noticing it is not a terrible thing, but it shouldn't be something that divides us – we can't let it. What I see in that diversity is a wide range of experience and knowledge – and good people who can do amazing things when they come together – as we do here, again and again and again.

At the end of the day, we are all neighbors, and we are all a part of the City of Chattahoochee Hills. While it's important to acknowledge our differences, it's more important to celebrate what we have in common, and to work together toward our common goals. My request is that you do what you can to help us make that happen.

One last thing: I just want to say what a privilege it is for me personally to be working with this group. I'm talking about not only the elected officials and city staff sitting up here in front of you, but also the many volunteers, concerned citizens and friends that I see in the audience. It's an excellent group of awesome people – people that really care about their neighbors – that care about their community. I feel truly blessed to be able to play my part in that process.

So, what is the state of our city? It's awesome, and getting better every day! I appreciate your help in making that continue.

Thank You



Tom Reed

Mayor, Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia