

Again, to all of the elected and appointed officials, our sponsors, the citizens and my family, welcome and thank you all for joining me.

I also want to express my gratitude to the Council for Quality Growth, our Communications team and my assistant Katrina Holloway for organizing this event today.

To all members of our board of County Commissioners -- Welcome and thank you for your service to Clayton County and your dedication to our constituents.

Fellow Residents and business owners of Clayton County, this is an exciting time to be your Chairman, and I would like to thank you for the honor of serving you for another year.

This afternoon I hope to provide to you a state of the county address that not only explains the accomplishments of our administration, but that

shows a county turning the corner in a new direction, one of professionalism, transparency, and results driven.

A county on the road to gaining credibility and trust with our voters and community members. Before you, you have a presentation with much more department by department detailed accomplishments; I will try to give you the highlights as I see it.

What you will hear and see this afternoon is that to move forward is not enough.

We must be moving in the right, positive direction and I believe that last year will show that we are moving not just forward, but more importantly in the right direction.

So, the question is what have we done over the past year? Good question let me tell you. When it comes to our finances, our county is fiscally

strong. Clayton County has a very good credit position, and its Aa2 rating matches the median rating of Aa2 for counties nationwide.

Key credit factors include a robust financial position, an exceptionally light debt burden, a moderate pension liability, and an extensive tax base, but we have a somewhat weak wealth and income profile, but despite that the financial position of the county is very strong and is relatively favorable in comparison to the assigned rating of Aa2.

The cash balance as a percent of operating revenues (95.5%) is far above the US median. In addition, the fund balance as a percent of operating revenues (27.7%) is on par with the US median.

The County's finance department has received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for 41 consecutive years, which is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government.

The County has also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for 16 consecutive years.

This award is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting. Only 1,491 entities have received the award out of approximately 18,000 government finance professionals throughout North America.

Please let's hear it for our Chief Financial Officer Ramona Bivins and her staff for the great job they are doing.

So the next question is “what have we done in the last year to make Clayton County better for our citizens and employees?” Let me start by sharing with you what we were able to do for our employees.

First, we gave all of our employees a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment. As a board we understand that as the economy grows the cost of living goes up as well, which has a direct impact on our employees.

Therefore, it was important to us that we provide a COLA to our employees so they would be able to keep pace with the economy.

We also provided funds in the budget to continue Merit Increases for all employees after being evaluated on their anniversary date of hire.

An employee can receive a pay raise based on his or her job performance anywhere from receiving nothing to 6.25%. The board of commissioners also approved a public safety housing incentive for first responders within the police, sheriff and fire departments who choose to relocate to Clayton County.

For employees who move into an apartment we provide them with a \$150 dollar monthly stipend for a year to help them with their rent and for someone buying a house we offer \$250 dollars a month to go toward their mortgage.

We increased the minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$10 dollars an hour to also keep up with inflation. I always say that our employees are our most valuable asset, it was time to quit talking about it, and being about showing them, they are valued.

Please let's give our Chief Operating Officer Detrick Stanford and our county employees a round of applause for all they do each and every day.

When it comes to our bosses, the citizens of Clayton County, we heard your concerns about animal control issues, illegal littering and dumping and non-compliant business and homeowners.

When it comes to animal control we budgeted an additional 4 Animal Control Officers, and the chief of police has solicited more rescue and volunteer organizations to assist them at our shelters.

We also funded four additional Animal Control Kennel Technicians and two more Animal Control Officers. To address the growing number of code enforcement complaints, we added 8 new Code Enforcement Officers and 2 Code Enforcement Supervisors.

Now, I know we can all agree that one of our biggest issues has been illegal littering and dumping. Some of the areas in the county has been worse than others, but this pass year we have been very serious and intentional about addressing this problem.

The board funded additional positions within the warden's budget to hire more officers so we could have a work detail crew in each commissioner's district.

When we receive calls from citizens about trash on the roadway or receive emails from our Click Clayton application, we contact the warden and he sends his crews out to mitigate the problem.

By adding additional crews, we will be able to address the problem quicker and more efficiently. I also have to acknowledge Sheriff Hill and the Sheriff's department who also has prisoner work crews working throughout Clayton County everyday cutting grass and picking up trash.

Let's hear it for Warden Nelson and Sheriff Hill for helping keep Clayton Clean and Beautiful. Now, since I mentioned our Keep Clayton County Beautiful initiative this would be a great time to talk about our newly created KCCB manager's position.

Our new manager over this office is Lexi Morgan, stand up, she will be responsible for implementing, educating, and creating initiatives to

combat our littering issues, and to collaborate with our city counter-parts and community partners to KEEP CLAYTON CLEAN and BEAUTIFUL.

Now, in 2015 the citizens approved a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for a number of community projects to be built, well I am happy to say that this pass year we have been able to start a number of those projects, which you may have seen throughout the county as you drove around.

Projects such as the NE Senior Center, NW Library, NW Police Precinct, the District 4 Recreational Center, the District 3 Intergenerational Center and the Information Technology Training Center by the courthouse. All of these facilities should be operational in 2020.

This time last year during the state of the county address, I told you that we could do a better job making sure that our citizens were receiving accurate and up to date information about what is happening in our county.

Well, I am happy to report today that after a lot of hard work, we kicked off our Community Engagement Initiative in December of 2019. The Communications Department and Nickel Works Consulting, LLC. has been leading the charge on this project.

The objective of this initiative is to make sure that the county is positioned to provide comprehensive communication to all of its residents and businesses in the most efficient manner and in a way that meets the needs of the varying generations that are reflective of our diverse county.

The project started with creating a comprehensive database that will contain all homeowner associations, civic organizations, and non-profit and faith-based groups. To date, they have contacted over 300 organizations.

With the new database, we will be able to reach more of our residents to inform them of important projects and initiatives such as the Branding effort, Census 2020 and the upcoming SPLOST.

On February 20th, we had our community engagement kickoff event at the Clayton County Professional Learning Center, which was well attended. Citizens ranging from our seniors to our youth visited interactive stations to give feedback on how they want to learn more about what's happening in Clayton County, and trust me we have a lot going on in Clayton County.

Now we all know that tourism and the film industry is big business in the state of Georgia, so let me share with you the impact that it had in Clayton County last year.

Governor Kemp reported the Tourism impact for Georgia during Tourism & Hospitality Day at the Capitol on January 21, 2020. The State of Georgia's Tourism Office provides economic impact at the county level from reporting derived from the U.S. Travel Association.

The Governor reported that the total economic impact for Clayton County last year was \$1.5 billion dollars, which is a 3.7% increase over the prior year.

When it comes to the film industry Clayton County hosted 52 film and television productions in 2019. Our top five filming locations generated a total of \$706,000.00 in location fees alone.

It was suggested by Georgia State University using a very conservative economic multiplier of 1.87 that Clayton County's economic impact from the film industry was approximately \$1.3 million last year.

Production crews spent a record 405 days filming in Clayton County and some of the movies that were shot here include Bad Boys for Life, which happens to be the highest grossing January theatrical release of all time, Jumanji 2, Coming to America 2, the Watchmen, Ozark season 3 and many, many more. Let's hear it for Tamara Patridge the Executive Director of the Clayton County Tourism and film office, her staff and their board of directors for the great job they are doing.

Now, please allow me a few more minutes to brag on our young people, and our seniors. First, I would like to point out how proud we are of our Youth Commissioners. Our Youth Council was established five years ago and they have been making us proud ever since.

Last year they took home 1st Place for Region 13 for the 2nd time in a row in the Secretary of State's Student Ambassadors Program. In addition, in June of last year, in collaboration with the Clayton County Board of Health, they executed the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP).

GA PREP is a state administered federally funded initiative designed to educate youth between the ages of 11 and 19 on both abstinence and contraception for the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

The goal of PREP is to reduce the occurrence of pregnancy, HIV and STIs among high priority youth. The health of our youth has a direct impact on our community and I applaud our Youth Commissioners for making this initiative a priority for their agenda. Please let us give them and our Youth Services staff a round of applause for doing a great job.

Now our seniors, I always say we have the liveliest, sassiest, and boldest seniors anywhere in the world. If you have not seen our seniors in action then you are missing a treat, they are truly something else. However, let me say this because we have such fantastic seniors they expect us to provide the best we have for them and that is exactly what we strive to do each and every day.

We have a great Senior Services Department and to accentuate that point our senior facilities Frank Bailey, J. Charley Griswell, and Kinship Care Resource Centers received National Accreditation last year.

At present, they are the only Nationally Accredited senior centers in the state of Georgia. Our Senior Centers are accredited by the National Institute of Senior Centers under the National Council on Aging. This means our senior centers meet the highest standards of excellence.

Since becoming a member of the National Council of Aging in 2016, our Senior Centers have also won four National Program of Excellence Awards for their innovative and creative programs. Clayton County Senior Services Department is truly changing the face of aging. Let's hear it for Director Tori Strawter-Tanks and her staff.

I love bragging on our citizens here in Clayton County and if you allow me just a few more minutes of bragging rights, I would like to show you our state of mind and what makes us CLAYTONSTRONG!

(Que Video)

Now, I would be remised if I did not take a few minutes to talk about our school system and the great work they are doing in our county. The school superintendent Dr. Morcease Beasley held his state of the schools

address on January 28th and he delivered a great report on the state of our schools that was both positive and encouraging.

It is important that we have a strong school system because there is a direct link between economic development and school systems. Why would anyone want to bring their business to a county or city where their children could not receive a quality education?

I am standing before you today to declare to all that your children can and are receiving a quality education in the Clayton County School System.

I truly value the relationship that the county government has with the school system because we all should be working together to make our county the greatest county that we can have. The foundation of doing that starts with our children.

For those of you who were not able to make it to his address I would like to provide you with a few of the highlights he presented;

- The overall Graduation Rate is 72% and improving every year
- 7 out of 11 regular high schools graduation rates are above 80%
- 2 out of 11 regular high schools graduation rates are at 100%
- 2 of the nation's top 50 high schools are in Clayton County
- We have Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement with students earning associate degrees
- They implemented Dual Language programs in Spanish, French, and Chinese with Arabic offered as a world language
- Magnet schools include Healthcare, STEM, Early College, Fine Arts, and Political Leadership
- Career Pathways are in all high schools with a Firefighter & EMT Pathway, also in Aviation, Construction, and International Business, to just name a few.
- New schools planned to be built include Morrow HS, Forest Park MS, and Lovejoy ES.
- There are plans to build a new College and Career Academy to serve all high schools with pathways in Aviation, Transportation and Logistics, and Artificial Intelligence.
- All of our 6th Graders are in Accelerated Math in preparation to take Algebra in the 8th grade.
- 80% of our 9th Graders are in AP and Career Pathways
- And we have Project-based learning in our elementary schools.

Please let us give our superintendent, school board, teachers, Support staff and most importantly our children a round of applause for all of

their hard work.

So, what can we expect for 2020? Let me start by saying that the County must collaborate, not compete with one another. Unfunded mandates and jurisdictional boundaries are real. But the systemic, major forces of change or trends facing our communities require a coordinated countywide response.

So, in that vein we plan to grow economic development through comprehensive strategic land planning and financing. We plan to leverage zoning opportunities to attract business development and enhance the value of key County corridors.

We will be intentional about recruiting industry leaders to help identify key resources to develop the local workforce. We will provide expanded, accessible and diversified program opportunities for Clayton County's seniors to include non-profits and other thought leaders in the region.

You will see the implementation of recommendations identified in our 2020 Clayton County Branding Initiative that serves as the catalyst for defined messaging Countywide.

In addition, we plan to implement inclusive countywide collaborative strategies for a complete count in the Clayton County 2020 Census. And, since I'm on the topic of the Census I can't begin to tell our citizens how important it is for our county to get a complete and accurate count of everyone.

So much is tied to the census from federal funding to congressional representation. Clayton County will benefit greatly simply by making sure that everyone is counted, so please make sure your house is counted, your papa's house is counted, your auntie, uncle, brothers and sisters houses are counted and let's keep it real some of you claimed your dog Fifi on your income taxes so go ahead and claim her too.

Obviously, I'm just kidding....but please wherever you live tell everyone to get counted because the whole state of Georgia will be impacted by the census count.

2020 is going to be a stellar year for Clayton County so if you get caught sleeping on us you're going to miss out on something great.

Before I take my seat I want to leave you with a parable called the Mouse Trap.

A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package. "What food might this contain?" He was devastated to discover it was a mousetrap.

Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning. "There is a mousetrap in the house!"

The chicken clucked and scratched, raised her head and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is a grave concern for you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it.

The mouse turned to the pig and told him, "There is a mousetrap in the house."

The pig Sympathized, but said, “I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it but pray. Be assured you are in my prayers.”

The mouse turned to the cow. She said, “Wow, Mr. Mouse. I’m sorry for you, but that’s no skin off of my nose.”

So, the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmers mousetrap alone.

That very night a sound was heard throughout the house like the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey.

The farmer’s wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a poisonous snake whose tail the trap had caught.

The snake bit the farmer’s wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital and she returned home with a fever. Everyone knows you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup’s main ingredient...yep chicken.

However, his wife’s sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig.

The farmer’s wife did not get well; she died. So many people came for her funeral; the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them.

Therefore, the moral of the story is the next time you hear someone, a business, the school system or a city or county is facing a problem and think that it will not affect you then think twice. We are all connected in some way or another and for us to be successful as a county we must all

work together to address each other's concerns and work collectively to move our county forward.

Now, if you cannot remember this parable then remember Psalm 133 verse 1, Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! Clayton County is moving forward, and we are not looking back. The state of our County is strong and together we will make it stronger. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless Clayton County.