



2016 State of the City Address
Mayor Mike Bokder
as prepared

Thank you and wow. Great video! You didn't think I was going to sing that, did you?

It is a great morning and I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to join us today for our annual State of the City Address.

2016 marks a special milestone in the history of Johns Creek as nearly ten years ago our referendum was approved by over 70% of the voters to become a City. A city full of energy and promise. And since that time, we have walked this path together. Many of you that helped start this city are sitting in this room today. We shared a common goal to meet our fate and create what would be the ultimate in self-determination. A city that would be ours. A city where we made our own rules to follow and set goals that set us apart. We dared to dream what we could become.

And as we have grown into an even more exceptional community during this relatively short period, we have much to celebrate. Widely sought after residential living, highly acclaimed medical facilities, and premier municipal services are at the forefront of our success.

Top schools that are nationally recognized for academic excellence; safest large city in the state; world class golf and tennis; 300 acres of park land and growing; and a high standard of life. It is easy to understand why, according to 24/7 Wall Street Johns Creek was recently recognized as the 3rd best city to live in the United States.

Over the last two years we have been refining our brand, Be The Exception. You will hear that many times throughout this speech. It's not just a slogan. It is an ever evolving goal.

There is no better representation of this ideal than the high quality people who are continuously drawn to this city to live and establish businesses. Our residents and business owners come from all over the nation and the world. This diversity of culture



and ideas is the foundation of our strength, and it will continue to propel us to even greater heights than we have already achieved.

And I cannot think of a more immediate example of this ideal than by just looking around this room. Your drive to work hard and strive to Be the Exception is evident in all you do.

Our gracious sponsor, Emory Johns Creek Hospital, led by CEO Marilyn Margolis, is but one example. Their investment in our community has not only spawned ancillary and supporting medical services, but gives us the peace of mind that first class healthcare is at our door.

Our hosts, the Johns Creek Business Association and Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce encourage a healthy ecosystem of entrepreneurs and thriving businesses that create jobs and provide local conveniences.

Johns Creek Business Association President Stephen Vorbeck and Chamber President John Bemont. We appreciate your leadership and the valuable contribution your organizations' make in our City every day.

This beautiful venue, the Atlanta Athletic Club, under the leadership of Kevin Carroll, which surrounds us this morning, supports our desire for leisure facilities that are world renowned and hospitality that only an exceptional city can deliver.

The long history of the Johns Creek Community Association, now led by Judy Lafave, has shown its influence in shaping the very fabric of our City well before we even dreamed of becoming who we are today.

Our City Council, who work diligently for the people of Johns Creek to help ensure the long-term success of our city, are dedicated to shaping our vision to be exceptional. I would just like to a moment to acknowledge each member and thank them for their dedication and service to our City.



Post 1 Lenny Zaprowski,

Post 2 Jay Lin,

Post 3 Cori Davenport,

Post 4 Bob Gray,

Post 5 Stephanie Endres and

Post 6 Mayor Pro Tem Steve Broadbent.

My good friend and longtime resident of Johns Creek, Lynne Riley, please stand and accept our continued support in your role as our State Revenue Commissioner.

Our State Senator and President and CEO of the Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce, Brandon Beach. Thank you for your leadership and for building a strong Chamber to represent all of our North Fulton cities.

Our State Representative and former City Councilman Brad Raffensperger. Thank you for always looking out for your hometown!

Our Fulton County Commissioner, Vice Chair Liz Hausmann. You were there from the beginning and rose to the challenges of higher office. We commend you for your dedication to not only Johns Creek but to all of Fulton.

Commissioner Lee Morris. Thank you for your support and ongoing partnership on the Fulton County Board of Commissioners and for looking out for our citizens.

Mayor David Belle Isle... my friend and colleague here in North Fulton. I commend you for the incredible job you are doing in Alpharetta. I wanted to let you know that I'm still working on mastering that "50 Ways to Avoid Avalon Map" you gave me for my birthday.

Mayor Eric Clarkson...what a phenomenal job you are doing in the City of Chamblee! The renaissance over the past few years is amazing.



At the vanguard of exceptionalism is our Fulton County Board of Education. I'm proud to say their President and Johns Creek resident, Linda McCain has been representing us since 2010 and now serves as its President until 2018.

Representing Alpharetta and Milton, former School Board President, Katie Reeves. She has tirelessly worked on behalf of our students for decades...and she's only 29, so thank you Katie!

Former Johns Creek City Councilman Chris Coughlin

Thank you all for your public service.

We also want to recognize some of our business partners:

Johns Creek Advantage CEO Courtney Bernardi; Fulton County Development Authority Executive Director Al Nash; Johns Creek Foundation President and good friend, Wayne Carrel; our City staff, led by our City Manager, Warren Hutmacher, please rise. These are the faces that bear our logo on their sleeve representing our city every day. I could not be more proud of this exceptional team. Their care and dedication to improving our quality of life is constant and unrelenting.

Last but never least is my family who inspire me and challenge me to be at my best every day. My beautiful wife, Lisa, carrying our little Emma Kate who will be ready to face the world in June.

I am truly humbled and honored to be your Mayor. I am constantly inspired by those around me and as we look toward the future, I am heartened by the path we have forged.

I've noted the exceptional people who lead our city, but I have not highlighted another, and arguably, most critical demographic to our future - our young people.

At our March 14th Council meeting we had three groups of Northview High School students approach the podium and I was literally brought to tears as I listened in awe of



their vision and purpose to make this world a better place. Their selfless drive to help those in need demonstrates a maturity well beyond their years.

The inspirational examples of the young people from each of the schools within our city would take hours for me recount. And if this thought alone is not enough to infuse my optimism, I cannot think of any that will. I will talk about their influence later this morning.

Another recent event from which I draw inspiration followed the Council's two day retreat last month in the peaceful city of Mountain Park. Now, putting seven individuals, much less elected officials, with differing opinions, backgrounds, and perspectives into a room for two days, and live to tell about it, now, that was inspiring enough!

I sincerely respect each Councilmember because they are just as passionate about the success of this city as I am. After some open discussion, we joined together and walked away with a more succinct Mission and Vision Statement and six associated goals that we will focus on in 2016 and beyond. Within those goals, we also created five Task Forces that will be led by the Council members, supported by Staff and citizens relative to the issues at hand. I will outline the responsibilities of each as we move along.

Our new mission is quite simple. To be an exceptional city. The goal was to have a simple, yet aspirational mission statement of which all things could be judged. Sounds simple, yet it requires a tremendous amount of effort to maintain, but that is what you expect and deserve.

Our Vision states that Johns Creek strives to provide for an exceptional residential community with ease of movement throughout, an alive town center, and a vibrant business community. So the question you may be asking is, how do we turn this vision into reality? Let's begin by taking a close look at our 6 goals and how we have already moved in this direction in 2015.



Our First goal is to focus on Transportation...everyone's favorite subject... by providing a comprehensive transportation network that facilitates ease of movement throughout the city. In order to identify the solution to our traffic congestion, we first examined what factors contributed to this challenge: A primary factor is that Johns Creek sits at the heart of one of the fastest growing regions in the country.

To our north, Forsyth County is now the 11th fastest growing county in the country. The Atlanta Regional Commission estimates that Forsyth County will more than double by 2040. To our east, Gwinnett County will surpass Fulton as the largest county in the state, adding another half million people by 2040.

On the western borders, the City of Alpharetta alone has increased its population by nearly 10 percent. Even in Johns Creek, our population has grown over eight percent just since 2010... so when you factor in the growth both in Johns Creek and the surrounding areas, the volume of motorists throughout our city each day is staggering. As a result, over 50 percent of the traffic in Johns Creek both originates and ends outside our city limits.

As we face these challenges, our success will rely on mutually beneficial agreements with surrounding jurisdictions and our continued partnership with the Georgia Department of Transportation, as they take the lead on many significant projects throughout Johns Creek.

Our Public Works Department expertise is invaluable and their dedication to identifying innovative ways to improve our roadways and to leverage technology reflects their tireless efforts to conquer this challenge.

You've heard me say this many times, but it is a great analogy...you can't shove 10 pounds of sugar in a 5 pound bag. Something always has to give. And our Public Works department simply does an amazing job at finding ways to get the most out of that 5 pounds of sugar.



Our strategy includes a two-pronged approach. Our first is to integrate our 5-year Transportation Strategy into our Comprehensive Plan. Our second is to work with regional partners through the Transportation Resource Implementation Program or TRIP, so that we make wise choices in improving our local roads and work within a regional framework to address corridor improvements.

Over the last two years, the City Council and our Public Works Department have taken a more aggressive approach to improving our roadways. We began or completed 15 traffic improvement projects and currently have more than 25 potential projects in our pipeline, all identified to help traffic flow more freely.

In 2015, the City Council dedicated more than \$5 million to roadway improvements and received an additional \$10.6 million in Federal dollars. We are well ahead of schedule to fulfilling our promise to making resurfacing our streets a top priority with 34 neighborhoods completed in 2015 and 26 more slated to be completed in 2016. As part of our ongoing Intelligent Traffic System rollout, crews will soon install cameras at key intersections and connect them by fiber optic cable to our Traffic Control Center at City Hall where our Traffic engineers monitor traffic flow and manage the signal timing remotely to keep the cars moving.

In our continued pursuit to leverage technology and innovation, we became the 38th city in the world to partner with the world's largest crowd-sourced traffic APP, WAZE, which will improve our ability to better prioritize where future dollars for roadway improvements need to be allocated.

So as you can see each of these improvements is designed to help *move* motorists more efficiently.



We recognize that traffic woes effect everyone. And although improvements have made our lives a little better...we know we cannot please everyone. To prove that, one day I was walking down the hall at City Hall and stopped in to chat with Janet Rossi...who is our Citizen Responder for our call center. In her office was a poster that caught my eye.... A while back we received a letter from neighbors that live on Bolster Court in Johns Creek. They, apparently, were very upset about us attempting to fix a dip in the middle of a cul-de-sac and had this to say (see video)

While everything is relative, the same is true for an even bigger issue... so, let's talk transit! The expansion of MARTA heavy rail transit brought out folks from both sides of the aisle.

Conventional wisdom might suggest that an expansion of MARTA heavy rail up 400 will significantly reduce traffic congestion and therefore should be a no brainer. However, before we dig deeper into our pockets to support an investment in a heavy rail expansion with a price tag of over \$1.6 billion, I believe we need to weigh the challenges we face and the other options available.

So, we stepped out of the box. We asked some bold questions...which, in the end, put me in some hot water, but for all the right reasons.

If we simply nod our heads, we get a plan that addresses the needs of the few at the expense of the many. Mayor Belle Isle and I stood firm along with our respective Councils, against the rush to move heavy rail up 400. I believe that our stand led to the creation of Senate Bill 369 under the leadership of Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones.

SB369 provides opportunities for voters to determine whether they would be willing to fund nearly \$600 million in road improvements throughout Fulton County, of which Johns Creek could raise approximately \$82 million. We are currently finalizing our list



of projects that would potentially be included in the referendum. It is far from decided and we will actively seek public input along the way.

But, we should not be afraid to have this debate and to look for innovative, cost effective ways to deliver more efficient road improvements and mass transit expansion.

I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Pro Tem Jones for getting the TSPLOST discussion back on track and giving us *all* the opportunity for better long range transit options.

While the adults continue to debate this issue, our young people have already taken action. In February of this year, a group of Johns Creek High School students won a national app challenge sponsored by Verizon. Their ride sharing app, called *VROOM*, is designed to pair drivers with students for carpooling. They are working with MIT on the final version. They get it!

Our second Goal is related to Recreation and Parks. We want to ensure a complete recreation and parks system that aligns with the goals and needs of our community.

Parks in Johns Creek are not just a nice-to-have feature; our recreational and parks programs are an essential part of maintaining a high quality of life. Our goal is to embrace the cultural and stage of life diversity that exists in our community by providing recreational amenities that meet the needs of all of Johns Creek residents.

After months of feedback through a community driven process the priorities have emerged. We heard you! You told us you want more parks, a system of recreational greenways, and a wider range of programs that meet the needs of people of all ages and capabilities.



Last month, our Council approved a Master Recreation and Parks Plan which will guide the improvements and expansion of our parks system over the next 10 years that will include all that you have asked for.

As a featured catalyst in our parks vision, we took a courageous step forward early last month by purchasing more than 130 acres of prime open space with river access at Cauley Creek. This has the potential to be a signature park in our system.

The City Council followed the Cauley Creek purchase with another 20 acre linear park. Adding these and several smaller pocket park locations, brings over 150 acres of new recreational land into our system. That nearly doubles the park land we had 10 years ago. Now that is significant.

I commend our Council and Manager for recognizing our sense of timing and the need for pre-emptive purchases to acquire precious land before it vanishes. I appreciate our citizens for their interest in improving and growing our parks system and their suggestions for what is possible.

Our third goal is to implement a holistic economic development plan approach that addresses infrastructure, workforce, community, and land development needs. To accomplish this, the City Council approved the city's first Strategic Economic Development Plan or SEDP in February of this year.

The SEDP represents a citywide strategy that is designed to establish Johns Creek as competitive force in economic development arena. It is also to safeguard a strong business climate while preserving and protecting the high quality residential character of our city.

The SEDP was informed by lessons learned from other cities and includes recommendations that involve increased public/private partnerships, attracting key



businesses that fit the character of Johns Creek, and protecting the assets that have resulted in our reputation as one of Atlanta’s premier residential communities.

One of the tremendous benefits of this, is that it does not compel City Council to act or allocate expenditures, but rather lays out a framework with various checkpoints throughout the process that will be crafted through citizen engagement. It includes consideration of the potential impact any decision may have on transportation and movement throughout the city.

History demonstrates when City governments are actively involved in economic development they are more likely to succeed in ensuring the economic vitality of their cities.

To quote Benjamin Franklin – If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.

Our Fourth goal focuses on Government Efficiency. More specifically, to develop an innovative and cost effective approach to exceptional service delivery. We’ve made major advances in reviewing our current operational and financial models and restructuring how we do business as we continue to be good stewards of your tax dollars.

Beginning in 2015, we incorporated significant improvements to our budget development process that gives a clearer picture of city expenditures this year and beyond.

The 2016 Budget is the product of a new, strategic planning process that utilizes a 10-year financial forecast model complemented by a scorecard method to prioritize capital requests.

This new process has allowed us to identify opportunities to increase efficiencies and reallocate funds toward priority, community-driven projects. It provides a strong foundation for future budget planning, and will continue to make a positive difference.



To assist in these efforts, I have appointed Councilmembers Bob Gray and Stephanie Endres to a special Finance Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to review the 10-year financial model and make recommendations to the Council in identifying the appropriate drivers to calibrate the model going forward.

Two additional task forces I believe will contribute to improved government efficiency are the Charter Task Force and the Civic Engagement Task Force.

Councilmember Stephanie Endres and I will work with City Staff and citizens to review the Charter and make recommendations focusing on correcting inconsistent, ineffective or confusing provisions within our Charter.

Councilmembers Lenny Zaprowski and Mayor Pro Tem Steve Broadbent will lead the Civic Engagement Task Force. They will work with City Staff and citizens to identify and recommend opportunities to foster and encourage meaningful citizen engagement. Focusing attention to each segment of this goal will deliver more meaningful results.

Our 5th goal is to support and invest in Public Safety. As Mayor, my number one priority has always been to keep our citizens safe. We have the greatest partners in this quest...we have truly exceptional police and fire departments. We have a Council that provides them all of the tools in the toolbox needed to do their job at the highest level.

Just one of many great examples is Detective Sergeant Ben Findley, who conducted a year-long investigation into individuals who made fake emergency calls to illicit dramatic police SWAT responses, known as SWATTING.

Let it be known that Ben tracked this all the way into Canada and “got his perp” which gained national and international attention because of his diligence and perseverance. On Apr. 18 he testified before Congress in an effort to move federal anti-Swatting legislation forward, and he will be appearing in an upcoming PBS documentary this fall touching on this same issue. We thank him and Chief Densmore for their leadership.



In 2015 Johns Creek was recognized as the safest large city in Georgia by Safewise.com. That's no small feat. The preparation and diligence of our fire department led to improved citywide fire safety ratings used by insurance companies, saving a potential \$6 million citywide in insurance premiums for our residents and businesses.

As our population grows we planned ahead to ensure our public safety keeps pace and that our police and fire departments remain properly resourced.

In response, we hired 4 new Police Officers to help improve response times across the city. We also hired 3 new Fire Fighters and an additional Fire Marshal to keep up with the demands of that department.

Our Fire Department also made purchases of State of the Art, life-saving equipment, including a new, custom-made swift water rescue boat that improved response time in saving boaters in the Chattahoochee River. By being able to navigate shallow water more rapidly, they have already saved lives this year.

All around us, we are continually facing a tragic issue... a heroin overdose epidemic and we are at the heart of the problem.

Nationally, more Americans now die of drug overdoses than they do in motor vehicle crashes. Think about that for a moment...

I could take our entire State of the City Address to speak about this issue. In fact, Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin did just that in a recent State of the State Address, as this is an alarming national crisis. As I've sadly pointed out in a recent Council meeting.....no one is immune. It's right here. It's under our noses.

And while we continue to fight from all angles, we are doing something about it. We included our Police Department to combat this epidemic in our Strategic Plan and joined the US District Attorney's Northern District of Georgia Heroin Working Group.



We want to acknowledge District Attorney Paul Howard's Task Force and the work of the Fulton County Commission for keeping this issue on the forefront throughout the County.

And as our police officers and paramedics are usually the first to deal with the gut wrenching scene involving an overdose, this past year we budgeted for each officer to carry what is known as Narcan. This injectable drug counters or reverses the effect of the overdose...saving lives when timing is of the essence.

We cannot let our pride nor fear of what our neighbors will think prevent us from protecting our most precious gift...our families.

Our Sixth and final goal is to preserve our residential character and to enhance our Sense of Community. The Council's approach to this goal reaches well beyond preserving our high quality residential character. It focuses more on our citizens and the myriad cultures represented throughout our city. It defines our character and gives way to a stronger sense of belonging.

Nearly 25 percent of our residents represent large demographic populations such as India, China, South Korea and other nations. Councilmembers Jay Lin and Bob Gray will be leading a Cultural Ethnicity Task Force whose purpose is to identify opportunities and make recommendations to engage and celebrate the various cultural ethnicities and identify any existing barriers.

Just a small microcosm example, year after year I have gone to Wilson Creek Elementary School for their Thanksgiving celebration and it amazes me that there are over 27 countries represented in the heritage of these students.

When anyone is asked, Why Johns Creek...the answer begins with "schools". Our education system is consistently recognized as leading on both a state and national level...and that begins with strong guidance from the Superintendent to the substitute



teacher. The expression, “A rising tide floats all boats” describes the interrelated dependence on each other for our mutual success.

To ensure our city always stays focused on supporting our schools, we are committed to paving a stronger communication path with our principals and administrators.

To assist in that effort, Councilmembers Cori Davenport and Lenny Zaprowski will be leading our School Support Task Force to identify and make recommendations to strengthen our relationship with all schools, both public and private ...and create a greater collaboration on pertinent issues.

2030 Comprehensive Plan Update

Another important component of enhancing our sense of community will be updating our Comprehensive Plan. Although not required until 2017, the Community Development Department has already begun its update to the city’s 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

This review brings together key stakeholders and interest groups that will guide land use decisions well into our future.

Last year I put forth a rather ambitious plan. I asked each of you to confidently step forward with me and Be Part of the Legacy that would define Johns Creek. I believed then and now that the challenge before us was worthy of a call to action... a bold approach to the way we think about our City. Why? Because we are the Exception. And those that lead with that attitude are the ones who empower others to believe in their own greatness. That attitude must prevail if we are to succeed.

If nothing else, last year’s speech got our community’s attention. It was meant to. It started a needed dialogue. In some corners it was very misrepresented, but it raised the issue that remains to be answered....how can Johns Creek sustain itself by staying stagnant while all of our surrounding communities are moving forward?

My answer was to get in the game...to create a town center with a sense of vibrancy unlike any other while protecting our premiere residential character.



It's happening all around us...Duluth, Peachtree Corners, Alpharetta...and as a result, our tax dollars are being spent there, where we need them to be spent here at home.

Looking back at the history of our humble beginnings, let's remember how we came to be. Decades ago the Standard Club and the Atlanta Athletic Club were the first to establish first class golf and club facilities, thus attracting more people to the suburbs and spurring a housing explosion.

A visionary, Charlie Brown then developed a business park, Technology Park, which became the core business trademark of this area. You may not realize, but Tech Park alone envelops 4 percent of our city, and is now filled with mature landscapes, lakes and trails, businesses and homes and is ripe for redevelopment.

I key in on Tech Park because it is but one of the few spaces in our city that is capable of growing with the needs of the community. It makes sense. So, how can we best utilize this space, and others that would serve that same purpose? How can we take advantage of their merits and bend them to make it our own?

This is our opportunity to be unique and to set the stage for what the majority of our citizens' want...a sense of place. A gathering centerpiece that allows families and friends to enjoy social events, art, music, theater and conversation that take our minds from the everyday stresses. It invites innovative companies to locate here or grow, thrive and participate in our success. It attracts sought after talent for those employers and employees who demand a well-rounded living and working environment.

We are in a good position to work our way toward our own town center. One that distinguishes us from the rest. One that captures the vibrancy of great spaces and includes *essential* elements of great cities, all while maintaining the residential character of Johns Creek. It can be done and we have every means to make it successful.

But with all ambitious ideas, it can't be done alone. With the support of non-profit organizations and our partnerships with you, private entities and businesses, we can



fully realize what we are destined to become. This may take decades, but we must start with a single layer and build upon our success along the way.

As I mentioned earlier, our youth are our eyes to the future. Their ideas and free thinking fuel a modern society. I don't want that to be wasted. Thus far they have not had an active voice in our community and I want to change that.

I want to invite them to have a seat at the table as we make plans for our future. Their future. Their influence can shape and alter the way *we think about our city* like no other. They may not make up 100 percent of our population, but they surely make up 100 percent of our future.

As of today, I am announcing a "Mayor's initiative" by forming a Youth and Millennials Advisory Council that joins together the brightest minds from each of our high schools and college graduates to do just that.

Let them dream. Let them imagine a city *they* want to come home to, just as we did 10 years ago. What do they see that we don't see and what can we become that they dream we could be? And how do we take those ideas and make our city what we strive to be...exceptional. This is what makes us exceptional and gives us the confidence to say that out loud.

It was not by chance or blind luck that we have become one of the most admired cities in which to live, work, play and be educated. Over the past decade, we have leveraged our experience, talent, strong work ethic, and high values to create the strong community that exists today.

I am confident we will look back with great pride at the decisions we are making together today.

My final message to you is this. We are blessed. God did not put us here at this place and time to be ordinary. Exceptional ideas come from exceptional people.



Let's continue to write our own history as we began this journey 10 years ago and prove each and every day that we are, and will continue to be nothing less than an *exceptional* city.

Thank you.