

**State of the City, February 3, 2012**

Good morning, and, on behalf of myself and our Council, thank you very much for joining us.

I would like to say thanks to our sponsors this morning—Emory Johns Creek Hospital and the Atlanta Athletic Club and our Hosts, the Johns Creek Business Association and the Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce for doing so much to make this event possible. I want also to thank both the Chamber and the Business Association for handling all the registration and getting the word out so you all could be here today. My thanks also to the Johns Creek Community Association and their work in making sure our homeowners associations had the information to get to their residents as well.

I want especially this year to take a moment to recognize the fact that many of the people who make these organizations work are volunteers. These people—often after a long day themselves at their own offices—dedicate their time and talent to making Johns Creek a better place for all of us to live and do business.

In many ways, thanks to you—we have a pretty wonderful place to call home.

And now, it is my pleasure today to recognize your Johns Creek City Council.

Post 1 Councilmember Randall Johnson—who could not be here today

Post 2 Councilmember Brad Raffensberger

Post 3 Councilmember Karen Richardson

Post 4 Councilmember Ivan Figueroa—who also could not make it

Post 5 Councilmember Kelly Stewart

Post 6 Mayor Pro Tem Beverly Miller

Thank you for all that you do.

Ladies and gentlemen—we may not always agree on a specific issue before us, but I will say this is a fine group of people. It is truly an honor to serve alongside them.

I also would like to recognize a few of our esteemed guests. Fulton County Commissioner, Liz Hausmann; Representative Lynne Riley; Rockdale County Commission Chair Richard Oden; And our neighbors, newly-elected Alpharetta Mayor David Belle Isle as well as their new Councilmember, Michael Cross; GDOT Board Member and Greater North Fulton Chamber of Commerce President, Brandon Beach.

Thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join us.

And now I would like to take a moment to thank our City Staff. These folks take so much pride in their work, and their service to you. I like to call out each of the department heads every year; however I am happy to say that we have had such low turnover here in Johns Creek that I believe you know them all. And so—I will ask that you recognize our City Manager John Kachmar—and all the city employees he represents here today.

Mr. Kachmar, if you could stand so that we can thank you—and your team—for the great work that you do.

We started the movement for the City of Johns Creek back in 2004. It was a fascinating and exciting time for many of us. It is hard to believe how much has happened since a small group of people got together and said—“What can we do to make this area of Fulton County better?”

Well—we answered that question with a voter referendum in 2006 which formed the City of Johns Creek. I believe that now—entering our 6<sup>th</sup> year of cityhood, we can say we did the right thing and honestly—things are better. I will talk a little more about what we have done this past year to continue that work—and I want to discuss what we can do to keep making things better—even better than any of us hoped back in 2004.

When the city started we pledged to adhere to three guiding principles. I want you to keep that in mind as I was go through this morning’s presentation. I know that at City Hall, we have that in mind in all that we do.

- Fiscal Responsibility
- Transparency
- Responsiveness

Let’s start with our budget.

This is the fourth year of declining revenue. Our 2012 adopted budget dipped just below the \$45 million mark for the first time. You can also see however, the decline has slowed. I think we are all looking forward to the day when budgets aren’t quite as tight, but in the meantime it is our job to work with what we have.

As everyone in this room probably knows, the City Council has not raised the millage rate to the allowable cap. In fact, in order to compensate for the downturn in the economy, we have looked for leaner and more efficient service delivery at every turn—tightened the belt you might say. At the same time—we have not cut services.

A test of fire will often make you better at what you do, and navigating the current economic climate has done just that. Last year's renegotiation of outsourced services, following an in-depth financial analysis of our contract agreements, allowed us to cut down on expenses while still maintaining excellent customer service.

I think the recent number crunching by *The Business Journal* that ranked Johns Creek second in the state and in the top 20 of over 1400 southern cities for quality of life says something about that.

We do this while we continue to maintain the lowest employee-to-citizen ratios in the state for cities over 50,000. As of January, 2012 the city had the equivalent of 233 employees serving a population of 76,728. That is just 3.03 employees per 1,000 citizens. According to data gathered by the Georgia Municipal Association, for cities in Georgia with a population of over 50,000—the average is 10.5 employees per 1,000.

Ladies and gentlemen—it can be done. We are proving it every day here in Johns Creek.

Now I want to look back at just a few things that the City has accomplished since 2006:

- We will start with—launching the City itself
- We then started up the Johns Creek Police Department
- We started up Johns Creek Fire Department
- We entered into a joint agreement with Sandy Springs to form Chattcomm 911 and we were later joined by Dunwoody
- We launched Founders Week—a weeklong celebration and parade which brought out about 5,000 people this year.
- We significantly strengthened and supported athletic and recreation programs.
- We improved parks—including making all public spaces ADA compatible and expanding parking at Ocee and Newtown Parks.
- We opened our active adult center, Park Place at Newtown School, the Newtown Dream Dog Park, completed phase I & II of the greenway, started a very successful farmer's market and launched the City of Johns Creek State Championship swim team.
- We worked with GDOT to complete the State Bridge Road and McGinnis Ferry Road widening projects.
- We installed a state-of-the art Traffic Control Center and completed phase I of a city-wide Intelligent Traffic system on Medlock Bridge Road.
- We weathered two of the most significant natural disasters to hit the State of Georgia in a century—the floods of 2008 and the snow of 2011.
- We issued or renewed 14,235 business licenses

- And here's one I can take no credit for, but I just LOVE this number so much. At our next meeting, our Council will recognize the City's 125<sup>th</sup> Eagle Scout.
- And while we were doing all of these things, we responded to 137,736 requests through our Citizen Response Center—that friends, is customer service.

Your concerns matter and your voice is heard.

This list could go on all morning—but I hope I am making my point. Every day this city works hard to get you a great return for your tax dollars and to earn your respect and trust. And we have done all of this without raising the millage rate—even once.

And now let's take a hard look at how this affects your life every day.

2011 was our second full year for CHATCOMM.

In August of last year, Chattcomm was named an Accredited Center of Excellence by the National Emergency Dispatch Academy, making it only the second agency in the state to receive that recognition. This is a far cry from the days of service delays and dropped and misdirected calls that had to put up with in previous years.

Today, over 90% of our calls are dispatched in under 60 seconds. That means in less than a minute your call has been answered and evaluated and an emergency vehicle is on its way to you. When we combine reduced dispatch times with the improvements in response times—that means how long it takes that emergency vehicle to reach your door—these improvements translate into lives saved and property protected in our city.

In 2010 CHATCOMM handled an average of 197 calls for service daily in Johns Creek alone. In that year, Chattcomm had 71,577 calls. In 2011 the numbers went up to 83,654 bringing the average up to 231 calls per day. The numbers speak for themselves and tell you that this is a much-needed service.

And—it is getting even better. We now have Smart 911.

Here's how it works: If you've subscribed to Smart 911, when you call in, the information you've provided appears on the emergency operator's screen. If that information is relevant to the 911 call, it is sent immediately to the responding vehicle, allowing them to begin to assess the situation prior to arrival on scene. More seconds saved, when they count the most. Remember to sign up at [www.smart911.com](http://www.smart911.com) and tell your neighbors.

Finally—just a note to everyone who has a telephone—both cell and land line—in the City of Johns Creek. Please go and check your bill to make sure that the mandated charge for emergency 911 is going to the City of Johns Creek. If it does not say so on your bill, please call

your carrier and ask them to correct it. If you do not get satisfaction, call City Hall or send an email to [info@johnscreekgga.gov](mailto:info@johnscreekgga.gov). This charge is how our 911 services are paid for and it is imperative those dollars come to our system.

Working with CHATCOMM of course is our Johns Creek Police Department.

I think many in this room are well aware of how our safety has improved, but let's look at some numbers—and these numbers are rounded but they tell you our direction.

### ***Traffic Fatalities***

Any fatality is a heart wrenching, and our prayers and condolences go out to the families who have lost a loved one in such a way. In Johns Creek, we simply cannot guarantee the safety of every person in a vehicle. What we can say is that through enforcement, presence, and education we have lowered the incidence of traffic fatalities from 12 in 2007 to 1 in 2011.

### ***Motor Vehicle Accidents***

We went from 400 per month in 2007 to 147 per month in 2011.

### ***Vehicle break-ins***

We had 40 per month in 2007 and we are down to 17 per month in 2011.

### ***Motor Vehicle Thefts***

We had 40 per month in 2007 and we are now down to 1 per month for 2011.

We are sending a very specific message to the criminals—if you want to break the law, Johns Creek is not the place to do it.

And we are amplifying that message by opening a precinct in the south end of the city in 2012.

Our police have also continued those great programs that have shown such success in our community.

**PACT (Police and Community Together)**—a neighborhood watch/education program for all residential neighborhoods in the city. We are now up to 50 neighborhoods. If yours is not one, please make it one.

**SHIELD**—our business watch/education program. We have 154 businesses—and we hope to see more in 2012.

**RadKIDS**—an important education program for our youngest children that enhances their knowledge, skills, and power to protect themselves from violence and harm.

In conjunction with our courts, the JCPD has a regionally recognized under-age drinking diversion program. If recommended by the City Solicitor, young offenders are able to work through a program allowing them learn to from their mistakes and, if they complete it, avoid the long-term implications a conviction can carry.

Of course, none of us ever want to be part of a court proceeding, but it does happen. And one thing our courts are interested in is keeping kids out of court a second time. Another program that courts are involved with is **STOP**—a teen driver safety program to educate our young people on safe driving. In 2011 the class had 622 court-ordered attendees and 98 guests. Let me be clear about the guests—parents voluntarily take their kids to this class. No court order, just a great chance at learning the lesson before anyone gets into trouble.

The recidivism rate—kids who go out and make a mistake again—is less than one percent. That is great news—it makes our youngsters and our roads safer. The program is so well-respected by those who have gone through it that **STOP** was expanded and offered at Johns Creek High School as well as at Northview High School in 2011.

#### **The Fire Department completes our public safety team.**

They are not only responsible for protecting lives and property in a fire—which they do so well—but they are also our first responders for medical crises.

Last year, the department responded to 4,528 calls. Of those, 2,133 were emergency medical responses.

Even more, 2246 were fire-related.

Now here are some very impressive numbers. Our average response time has dropped from 9 minutes, 05 seconds in 2008 to 2 minutes, 46 seconds in 2011. That is something worth talking about. We have dropped response times—to your door—by over 6 minutes. Because you have a City—with Johns Creek Police, Fire and Chattcomm—you are safer

And we don't stop there. Education makes us even safer.

Our **Heart Ready Program** continues to train citizens in CPR and Automatic Electronic Defibrillator use. With over 400 adults and children trained in 2011, it brings our total to over 1500 individuals trained.

The department has piloted the **Risk Watch Program** in two of our elementary schools. Each month a trained fire safety educator goes in and teaches a class to the entire second grade—touching on such important points as poison control, water safety, and of course—fire safety and emergency response.

The department hosted the first **Community Safety Day** welcoming over 300 citizens to the Medlock Bridge Fire Station on October 1st. We are planning for this event to just get bigger and better every year.

These things—and so much more—speak to their primary mission—citizen and property safety.

In 2010 Johns Creek launched our own **Swiftwater Rescue Team** and it's a good thing they did. The Chattahoochee River makes up 13 miles of our border. When the Corps of Engineers releases water from Lake Lanier, a fun-filled day on the river can suddenly become frightening, and very dangerous. The team has already shown its worth. In 2010 we had 7 swiftwater rescues. In 2011 we had 13. If you, or anyone you know, is planning to be on the river, always, always call to check the day's releases by calling the number on the slide. Know not only the times of the releases, but how long it will take for the water to get to where you are, by logging onto the link as well.

[www.nps.gov/chat/planyourvisit/downstream-flow-rate-buford-dam](http://www.nps.gov/chat/planyourvisit/downstream-flow-rate-buford-dam).

I know that is not easy to jot down, but this presentation will be on the City website. Please use it, and spread the word.

**Our Public Works Department** is also an integral part of our quality of life. This year the team was as busy as ever, and they have great plans for 2012. Great public works touches on everything we do here—from traffic control to community activities and everything in between.

They were one of the city's shining stars of the 2011 PGA at the Atlanta Athletic Club. On about day 4 of the tournament, one of the local TV stations was perched atop the pedestrian bridge, shooting film down Medlock Bridge and saying that —the real story here in Johns Creek was not the traffic—as was expected—but the excellent traffic management. Let's remember, this was all done while everything in the city went on, business as usual.

McGinnis Ferry Road was opened in 2011—not without hundreds of hours given by city staff to negotiate, cajole, smooth the way and in short tirelessly look out for the needs of our citizens and businesses.

The city launched the Intelligent Traffic System on Medlock Bridge Road—and although we can do nothing to reduce the number of cars, we can now adjust the signals in real time to ease congestion. The ITS project will expand this month on State Bridge Road, helping to ease congestion there as well.

The Public Works team oversaw the installation of beautification projects at Kimball Bridge and State Bridge Roads and at Buice and Old Alabama Roads this past year.

They oversaw the construction of the \$500,000 Beneful WagWorld Dream Dog Park. Thanks again to Pat McNeely and Koda for this wonderful lasting gift. Additionally, they finished the restoration of the Newtown School and opened Park Place—the City of Johns Creek’s state-of-the-art Adult Activity Center.

They have continued to fill in sidewalk gaps on Jones Bridge Road and on Medlock Bridge. This year you will see more amenities on the greenway—shelters, benches and even some plantings.

In Parks & Recreation we continue to expand offerings to fill our community’s needs.

Ground has been broken and we are looking forward to opening three new multi-use fields at Shakerag Park where our community can enjoy lacrosse, soccer and even cricket in the near future. Despite a rain out of Music in the Park Symphony Concert in June, we came back with a slightly scaled-down version in October. But the crowd wasn’t scaled down. Hundreds came out and enjoyed complimentary hot dogs and burgers while relaxing to the sounds of the Johns Creek Symphony Brass.

Our **Community Development Department** completes the picture and works very closely with Public Works to impact quality of life and support our business community. The department reports that home building permits held steady this year—moving from a low of 102 in 2009, to 134 in 2011.

What is encouraging about that number is that some of the work is reflected in what we call “housing restarts.” These are subdivisions that were stalled when the bottom fell out of the housing market and are now getting back on track. Additionally—our commercial building permits are up. We had a low of 83 in 2009. In 2011 we issued 124. Keep in mind that during these years we had north metro communities whose numbers were dramatically lower.

Closely related to community development numbers are business licenses. In 2011 we issued 2,516 licenses—about the same as 2010. What we have observed is that many home businesses that had been started by individuals, who might have been laid off in the first few months of the recession, are now closing their doors as those folks head back to work. That is great news for them. Meanwhile, those businesses are being replaced by new ones—we hope with more staying power.

I can tell you that the Council and I have had a significant uptick just in requests for ribbon cuttings. This is great news for us.

All this, and more, goes toward making our community a better, more financially sound and attractive place to live and open a business.

And now let's talk a bit about the future. A future that cannot be separated from sound Economic Development and a conversation about transportation.

Let's start with Economic Development.

The City has joined with the Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce and the city's major employers to launch an economic development initiative. It is time to find out what we are doing right, and what we can do better.

The 2011 PGA placed our city on an international stage. We welcomed golfers from 22 countries and greeted over 200,000 visitors in just 7 days. We got our chance to send our message—bigger and broader than anyone could have ever imagined back in 2006. The media value of the city's exposure was estimated at \$33.4 million dollars. We reached over 450 million households world-wide in live TV coverage. And now we need to keep up the momentum.

**Comment [MB1]:** Please check this figure?

2012 is the year for us to embrace our strengths and sell those strengths to future residents. We need to shore up our property values, support growth and sell ourselves not only to new businesses, but to our existing ones as well. We need to make this a place that they will want to stay, and expand in. We need not only to find a way to help those that are not here recognize that this is such a great community but to watch for, and remove, impediments that might stop those residents or businesses from choosing Johns Creek. We need to enhance and maintain the clean, upscale, unique and inviting community that we are. We will continue to monitor the regulations we have in place, and jettison those that do not make sense today, strengthen what needs to be strengthened, and only create more when absolutely necessary.

Johns Creek is considered by some to be a "tweener" community. We are lodged between GA 400 and US 85. Yes, it can make a trip to the airport a bit more challenging—personally, I think it is worth the extra mile or two. Being "between" means our community is not bisected by a highway. As we continue to work towards making our community more walkable, we have a great shot at getting people out of their cars and onto their feet or other modes—bikes, skates, whatever gets them where they want to go. And by being more walkable, and not having a highway run down our middle—we can become an attractive destination to shop, dine, take an art class—or meet up with some friends.

And while we are on that subject—how about we start having more dinners right here in Johns Creek? I challenge you—every time you think about dining out to, "Keep it in the Creek." I want our restaurants to shout out—loud and often—that they are located right here in Johns Creek. And I want to support that.

I have been talking with business leaders about making one night a month a real celebration of our community's night life. I am encouraging them to pick a local restaurant to promote to their

members and the community with a Let's Dine Out Together campaign. Let's invite our community to dinner. Let's Choose to Use Johns Creek and let's encourage our neighbors to come by and visit as well.

Meanwhile, we will continue to use our team to ease our local congestion and make that extra mile or two a bit easier to take so that being a "tweener" community becomes one of our real strengths.

We also need to recognize our community is still a product of the growth—north, south, east and west of us. With growth, we have inherited traffic, and lots of it.

Many of us moved here for the fantastic schools, proximity to Lake Lanier, the mountains, and to the metropolitan Atlanta area—but I doubt many moved here for the traffic. We just brought it along with us and I think we can all recognize and agree we have a major transportation problem here in metro Atlanta that has found its way to our front door.

The woeful investment in transportation and transit improvements is stifling growth, both regionally and locally.

The City of Johns Creek—through my work at the Atlanta Regional Commission and through our partnership with our sister cities of North Fulton — has spent months in an attempt to be part of a regional solution. Now we have the Transportation Investment Act—which you all will be asked to vote on this summer. I am not asking for your vote—but what I am asking for is that you look honestly at the problem and recognize its seriousness. It took 30 years to create this problem and may take even longer to remedy but we have to start somewhere.

If not the Transportation Investment Act—then what?

If you don't believe that the Transportation Investment Act is the best solution, then you need to do something to come up with a better one and make sure the legislature gets the message. The Act ultimately should generate only about one tenth of metro Atlanta's \$160 billion dollar transportation needs. It is a start, and will send a strong message to the business community that is carefully weighing whether to come to metro Atlanta or go locate in a different region. Without these businesses, we cannot get Atlantans back to work and improve our regional economy.

The project list is far from perfect, but the fundamental question you have to ask is "How will this affect you?" In addition to regional projects that would ease our congestion, Johns Creek would directly receive an estimated \$14 million over the 10 years which we can use to address local needs. That's a good amount of street paving, intersection improvements or other badly needed transportation projects here at home.

Importantly it will also impact public transit—and transit governance. Do we want a well-run, safe and efficient mode for getting in and around Atlanta? Do we want an alternative for all those vehicles traveling through Johns Creek every morning? Someday, do we want to see a transportation system that meets the needs of one of the largest metropolitan regions in the United States on the level of those in Washington or London?

I am not saying the Act is the ultimate solution—in fact it is far from it, but we have to start somewhere. Let's eat this elephant one bite at a time. Please, educate yourself and act. The future of the Metropolitan Region—and by extension, the future of Johns Creek is very much dependent on our taking responsibility now.

Meanwhile, at City Hall we will continue to do all we can to improve the quality of life that we are so proud of here in Johns Creek. We will partner with our schools, always asking how we can support our families and their priorities. We will continue work on activities that bring our community closer together and seek your input as to how we can do that better. We will support our Arts groups and continue to emphasize their part in the economic growth of our city. We will continue to be accountable to our residents and our businesses, every day, in everything we do.

And finally—we will always be grateful and mindful of how fortunate we are to serve a community as supportive, insightful and exciting as Johns Creek.

Thank you for your time this morning.

END