

**Mayor Mike Bodker Remarks**  
**2018 State of the City**  
**“See the Future”**  
(as prepared)

(**Note:** Performance by Chattahoochee High School’s *Chamber Singers*). What a great way to kick off any morning. If that doesn’t get the blood pumping, I don’t know what will.

And the musical selection – “A million dreams” – fits the theme for this year’s State-of-the City – “See the Future” - to a tee. I greatly appreciate Principal Corrigan for allowing his students to help kick off this year’s event.

Many of you have heard me frequently point out that the young people in the schools are not 100 percent of our population, but they are 100 percent of our future. And what we see here today and continue to see throughout our community from our students should provide everyone in this room with a strong sense of optimism for what our future holds.

From their community involvement and innovation, to their drive, determination, and compassion for others, I could not be more proud of our students.

I don't know who originally said, "When you start each day with a grateful heart, light illuminates from within;" but I try to take this approach – reflecting on the good in my life - with each new day to help energize and drive me in a positive direction towards the future.

By taking time to recognize and be grateful for the good that exists in and around our lives, this can serve as a great motivator for what needs to be done. And – as we look to the future – to ensure that we put ourselves on the right path to sustain all that we cherish and to improve upon it as well. Make it a sustainable legacy for the generations who follow.

Fortunately, I personally don't have to look very far each morning to measure how grateful I am, and to see who motivates me each and every day. My wife Lisa, my twins Jake and Keri, my nearly 2-year-old Emma Kate, my friends, my work, and the community I am blessed to live in, and I could go on and on. And I wish the same for everyone here as well.

And speaking of grateful, Marilyn Margolis, the CEO of Emory Johns Creek Hospital immediately comes to mind when I think about



community involvement and giving. First, this event would not be possible without Emory Johns Creek Hospital's sponsorship. Second, their support that they provide to our Fire Department each year with their efforts to raise money for the Georgia Fire Fighters Burn Foundation. And Third, their support to other Johns Creek community events throughout the year and, lastly, of course the excellent medical care that they provide to our residents at their highly acclaimed medical campus. You really do set the gold standard when it comes to giving.

I also want to acknowledge our host for this year's event - the Johns Creek Chamber of Commerce – and all the hard work and support they have provided to help make this event happen. Thank you to both the outgoing President John Bemont and the incoming President Kent Davies, and to their great team of Robin Buckley, Irene Petree and Laura Houston.

Another important thank you, goes to Perimeter Church for allowing us to hold the State of the City address in this beautiful facility and for their support in helping produce this year's event. Also, thank you for all the support you provide in our community as well.

I'm also very grateful that all of you are able to join us this morning for the annual Johns Creek State of the City address! It is both a pleasure and a privilege for me to be with you again for this 11<sup>th</sup> annual event. I am honored that this community has placed its trust in me over these many years, and I have worked hard each and every day to represent you as best I could. Right alongside my fellow councilmembers, I promise that I will continue to work as diligently on my last day as I have from my first day in office.

For those who know me, they know that I tend to wear my emotions on my sleeve. And I don't like putting people in the uncomfortable position of having to balance their own emotions of feeling sorry for me and feeling guilty because they just don't want to see a grown man cry. That's not good for anyone so I will do my best to keep it together this morning. This won't be easy because when I look around this room and see so many dedicated leaders, it truly warms my heart.

We changed things up a bit during last year's State of the City address when we were very fortunate to have Johns Creek resident Jeff Foxworthy participate. And we came very close to landing another

local celebrity this year as well but it didn't quite work out. Let's take a look. **(video plays)**

Many of you may remember Angelica Hale from her performances on America's Got Talent last year and her impressive second place finish, which has made her very much in high demand. Angelica was very interested in being here with us this morning but her schedule just would not allow it.

It never ceases to amaze me the amount of talent we have in our relatively small city of 84,000. From Jeff Foxworthy, Angelica Hale, and Usher, to prominent news anchors like Karyn Greer and Russ Spencer, to professional and Olympic athletes, to CEOs and other senior-level corporate executives, and top-tier educators; Johns Creek continues to be a beacon that attracts high performers from all walks of life.

Have you ever stopped to wonder why is this? What is it about Johns Creek compared to other cities in metro Atlanta that continues to make us so desirable?

We actually began this journey in 2006 when we developed a vision and a plan to become the premier residential community in Georgia. We imagined, we dreamed, and we continued to refine those plans that resulted each year until we arrived at where we are today.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” We believed, and our dreams became a wonderful reality. So now that we are here, what’s our dream for the future of Johns Creek? What do we see in our future?

When we invited you to join us this year, we did so with the intent of inviting you to do exactly that – See the Future. My hope is that you will leave here this morning with a desire to share your vision of the City’s future with us, and to remain engaged in the process to build on all that we have already accomplished together.

In front of you on the table you will find a viewfinder, and in it, as you flip through, you will see glimpses of what is possible for our exceptional community. New parks, new roads, new infrastructure. Each balanced between moving responsibly forward as a City while, at

the same time, maintaining the look and feel of the premier residential community for which we are well known.

Although the images you see are still in concept form, they provide an idea as to what can lie ahead, and the tremendous potential of an even brighter future for our already exceptional community.

The final designs for these projects have or will be influenced by community input, and I believe that we are headed in the right direction. I'm as excited and energized about the possibilities of moving our plans forward as I was the day I stepped into public office more than a decade ago.

As enthused as I am about what lies ahead, I sometimes wish I could hit a stop button and hold everything in place exactly where it is today and remain comfortable in that moment. However, despite the fact the physics behind such a feat are currently impossible, I do believe it's better to keep moving forward. Let's learn from the past, understand its present impact, and build upon these important lessons so we can better ourselves to sustain our success. Only then can we improve our community.

The City of Johns Creek would have never reached the heights it has without a vision and plan in place to move us forward responsibly. The schools within our city are some of the most awarded in the state, and we are consistently ranked as not only the safest city in Georgia, but among the safest in the nation as well.

As we continue to plan for our future, it is important that we draw closely from the lessons that created our strong foundation. We constantly ask ourselves how did we get where we are today? And how can we best use history to inform and guide us toward an even better tomorrow?

What led to the impressive accolades and the many lists Johns Creek has been recognized in over the past couple of years? From the safest city and tops in education to premier residential living, Johns Creek continues to remain as a highly sought out community in which to live, work, educate, and play.

It is important to point out that these key attributes did not happen on their own. As a community, we made them happen together. We

carved out our own piece of Fulton County 11 years ago and decided to chart our own course as an incorporated city.

We built our own Police and Fire departments with a focused effort on staffing each of them with the best leadership, personnel, and equipment. We filled the offices of City Hall with some of the most experienced and highly dedicated professionals any city could hope for. And we established what I believe to be a model for public-private partnership.

Essentially, we've created a municipal work environment where the best qualified, the pick of the litter, want to come work here.

As a result, because of our staff, the City of Johns Creek has gained a reputation in both public and private sector circles for its willingness to embrace innovation and the latest technologies.

The city's use of apps to improve public safety and infrastructure maintenance made it more convenient for residents not only to reach out to city staff with concerns, but it also made it easier to connect and engage with us as well.

Our open data portals have dramatically increased the level of transparency for our residents to track how, when, and where every tax dollar is spent. We've also increased the quality of our live streaming capabilities to make it more convenient and easier for residents to watch every City Council Work Session, Meeting, and Town Hall.

We also have the ability to now live stream Town Hall meetings from almost any location in the city and with the same quality as if we were streaming from City Hall.

We've also dramatically ramped up our social media and overall online presence. We proactively push information out to the public and to the media in support of our ongoing efforts to increase the level of transparency and engagement with our community.

Our Public Works Department continues to make improvements to its state-of-the-art Intelligent Traffic System and Traffic Control Center as well. It was the first in Georgia to install the flashing yellow light, and has smartly increased the use of roundabouts - all to help improve traffic flow and safety.

We recognize we have a long way to go to effectively tackle the same traffic congestion challenge the entire metro Atlanta area faces, and we won't rest until we find that perfect solution. Fortunately, we have leaders such as Tom Black on staff to help this ongoing effort.

We have been very fortunate to have benefitted from Tom's leadership and experience. Tom not only defines what it means to "leave no stone unturned" when it comes to securing state and federal funding to help offset the cost of transportation and parks projects, but he's also old enough that he actually invented the phrase "leave no stone unturned."

Tom is so old that he first moved to metro-Atlanta shortly after Sherman passed through on his way to the beach.

All joking aside, the entire community owes Tom a debt of gratitude for his service. Tom not only faithfully and diligently serves our community daily, but he also served our nation in Vietnam as well. He risked his life for us then, and he risks his reputation for us now.

And at the risk of too many clichés – albeit modified – he may be an old dog but this old dog is always on the lookout for new tricks. He and our staff are always looking for the new, the latest, the different, the most innovative technologies and techniques to make life better for our residents.

Thank you Tom for all that you and your staff do – working long hours both during the week and on weekends to improve our roads and parks. You’ve definitely helped to make 2017 one of Johns Creek’s best years yet.

And while we are on the subject, let’s take a brief moment before I go too much further to reflect on some of the high points of this past year...slow jam style (video plays).

You can tell from this video and the intro video we played earlier that our staff likes to have a little fun on the job. Not only are we fortunate to have, in my opinion, the best City Staff in the state or nation for that matter, but they have a little personality too.

They bring expertise, dedication, and unmatched work ethic to the job every day, and demonstrate genuine care and concern for the residents that they serve as well. As a result, we consistently receive high praise for their professionalism, integrity, and compassion.

A number of our senior staff members are here with us this morning too. Led by City Manager Warren Hutmacher, our Chief of Police Ed Densmore and Fire Chief Jeff Hogan---will all of our City employees please rise so that we can recognize you for all of your tireless efforts to care for this City and its residents?

Each year seems more productive than the previous and this past year was no exception.

In 2017, the City received not one, but two of the highest credit ratings any municipality or organization can receive in its first rating right out of the gate. Johns Creek received a Aaa rating from Moody's Investor Service, and a AAA rating from Standard & Poors Global Ratings. Out of over 20,000 cities in America, we are but one of 199 with a Moody's Aaa, and one of 338 with an S & P AAA rating.

I need to take a quick pause to personally thank our amazing Finance Director, Toni Jo Howard, for her leadership and fiscal guidance that helped Johns Creek achieve these impressive distinctions. Thank you Toni Jo for all that you do from managing our city's 10-year financial model to helping maintain a balanced budget each year. You are a true superstar and we are very fortunate to have you on our team.

Johns Creek used these ratings to obtain the \$40 million parks bond funding, which was approved by the residents of Johns Creek during the election in November 2016. These funds have paid for the installation of three synthetic turf fields, and for the concept designs on our five new parks. We will continue to use the Parks Bond to help in the build out of these new parks and for the refurbishment of our four existing parks.

The most significant addition to our growing parks system occurred when we closed on the 59-acre Quail Hollow property, which will be combined with the adjacent 133-acre Cauley Creek property to form the largest city park in Johns Creek, and by comparison is even larger than Piedmont Park. This new park is strategically located along the Chattahoochee River near the Abbotts Bridge Chattahoochee River

National Recreation Area. The final determination of how the land will be used will be planned through a thorough public process.

Our other four new parks include the linear park in Technology Park, the neighborhood park on Morton Road, and two pocket parks located on State Bridge Road and at the intersection of Bell and Boles Roads.

Additionally, the parks bond has breathed new life into the old Rogers Bridge restoration project. The new bridge across the Chattahoochee River will connect park facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in Johns Creek to Duluth, and will become an attraction and maybe even a landmark for our City.

Overall, I believe we have made great strides in the planning of our new parks, and I would like to share this vision with those who have not yet had the time to review the concepts for each (video plays).

The City also intends to continue to identify opportunities to purchase additional greenspace to meet the needs of our growing population, which is in line with our Recreation and Parks Strategic Plan.

Our City Staff, led by Community Development Director Sharon Ebert, and residents have also been hard at work on the next Johns Creek's Comprehensive Plan, which is currently under review. The current version reduces the number of community or "character" areas from 12 down to eight. Residents who reside in each area will have a tailored plan for redevelopment, parks, roadways, trails, and other activities that directly impact where they live. And I will touch on this a little later in my remarks.

In Public Safety, the Fire Department purchased a new fire engine and a new tiller truck to ensure their capability remains at the high end of safety standards for our residents.

Our Police Department has formed a close relationship with Fulton County Schools to integrate themselves into the schools with their active shooter program among others. We all recognize the critical need to protect our most precious asset and our future – our youth.

I talked a little earlier about the efforts of Public Works to improve our community, which also includes maintaining our curb appeal and home values through the city's repaving program.

Public Works has finished its third round of a four-year program to repave our neighborhood streets. Repaving crews resurfaced approximately 23 miles of streets in 17 subdivisions. Crews have also repaved three main roads: Rogers Circle, Findley Road, and Morton Road.

Overall in Fiscal Year 2017, the City budgeted approximately \$5 million dollars to resurface subdivision streets and approximately \$685 thousand dollars to repave main roads. Public Works has also recently completed another evaluation on all of our roads, and will present a new neighborhood repaving plan to the City Council this year.

Another major effort Public Works has been tasked to plan for is our TSPLOST projects.

We closed out the year by moving our City Hall to a temporary location while we refurbish an existing building in Technology Park. The consolidation of our City Hall, Police and Fire Departments under one roof will improve our already premier municipal services. We anticipate to move in around the end of the year.

We also closed out a number of important resident task forces, which were asked to ensure we remain fully engaged to best support the needs of our growing community. One task force of note, our Cultural Diversity one, set out to find ways to fully embrace one of Johns Creek's greatest strengths - our diversity.

Through this process, we learned that Johns Creek is the 10th most diverse small city in the nation. With an international population of nearly 35 percent, we are both unique and very blessed. Many of the 19 schools within Johns Creek host an international night each year, and each is truly amazing.

Between the food, art, and cultural performances, it really hits home that our young people gain an invaluable education beyond what they learn from our highly rated school curriculum. What they learn from each other is tolerance, understanding, and acceptance--All critical skills that will carry them far in life, and help make our world a better place.

Over the course of their years in our schools, they don't just have an opportunity to live the "think global, act local" mantra, they "see global," while acting local.

Unlike many other young people who have to save for years to travel abroad in order to gain experience in different cultures, the young people of Johns Creek have the opportunity to live all of that right here at home.

This is part of the reason I am so excited that Johns Creek is hosting its first International Festival on April 21<sup>st</sup> of this year. It's yet another great and fun way to bring our community together, and to showcase the City for what it truly is – a welcoming, safe, and highly successful place that is driving to build a future better for the next generation.

As the Chambers Singers alluded to in their rendition of "A Million Dreams," where will our dreams and plans lead?

Now that we reflected on the past and have taken a look at where we are today, let's talk about the future – and I'm very excited about this.

As I touched upon earlier, our Community Development Department is leading our update of the City's Comprehensive Plan, which is an important document that seeks to preserve and protect residential neighborhoods, and carefully manage future development growth.

Overall, the plan that was recommended by our 25-person Citizen Advisory Committee or CAC, was designed to minimize growth and density and, if fully realized, will average less than two units per acre of residential density city-wide moving forward.

Sharon Ebert, worked with outside consultants and volunteers from the community who comprised the CAC, and made great progress in developing a plan that, I believe, has the potential to be the envy of every surrounding municipality.

Talk about another gem in our amazing staff. Sharon has dedicated every ounce of her energy to both refine and drive this plan forward – putting time in sometimes seven days a week. Not because she is required to, but because she is that passionate and dedicated to reaching the best

outcome for our residents. And she has an amazing and equally dedicated team working right alongside her.

The CAC has worked for well over a year to significantly update the current draft and to improve the readability and presentation of the next. In general, the CAC has heard our citizens loud and clear regarding the desire to minimize growth and density.

While the City is not required to complete this Comprehensive Plan update until November of this year, I ask that you please provide feedback and input as soon as possible. We all know how quickly time can pass in our very busy lives and before you know it, the City Council will need to make a final decision on this plan.

To call this a transformative plan for the City of Johns Creek would be an understatement. It reduces density; dramatically improves connectivity between subdivisions, parks, schools, and shopping; and drives economic development in a smart but responsible way, and in a manner that will protect the character of our premier residential community. I could not be more excited about this plan and I hope you are too.

The same deliberate planning and focus that was used to build this exceptional City will also be required to ensure that Johns Creek remains that premier residential community well into the future. Please remain active and involved throughout this process. This is our town, and it will take a collective focused effort to sustain the path of success we have forged together.

Another plan I am equally excited about, which was born from an idea from one resident last year, and that I think will contribute to a positive transformation of Johns Creek, is called "I Heart Johns Creek."

I Heart Johns Creek was approved by the City Council just last month, and defines a clear focus for our city. This plan will provide an identity for Johns Creek as the Health and Wellness destination for metro Atlanta in the health and medical industry.

The visionary of this initiative, Anand Thaker, who is just one of the nearly 84,000 residents in Johns Creek, put a great deal of thought and planning into this impressive idea. An idea that is now a reality in the making.

As the City Council adopted its Strategic Economic Development Plan nearly two years ago, it did so to create a foundation or framework from which to build. While each had general thoughts of what it could become, Anand took it upon himself to create a very clear and detailed vision of what was sitting right in front of us all along.

With Emory Johns Creek's medical campus and the world's largest manufacturer of contact lenses, Alcon - along with many other health and wellness businesses already in place - I Heart Johns Creek creates a focused effort by the City to attract this industry to Johns Creek, as well as pull together existing healthcare and wellness businesses in and around the city in a more collaborative approach. All for the betterment of our residents and business base.

While Anand will be the first to say it was a team effort, make no mistake, this idea never would have come about or to fruition without his initiative and drive. Again, one person out of 84,000. One person with a vision and an eye to the future can make a difference. Thank you, Anand.

While we have so many positives to build on, we must recognize that in order to continue to improve, we also have to recognize any issues or challenges that stand in our way.

As transportation-related issues remain the top concern, we've taken the extra step to investigate what other issues we need to be made aware of that could have long-term consequences on one of the most premier residential communities in the nation. Many of you may be able to relate to some of the challenges we identified through the Twitter hashtag #JohnsCreekProblems. (display example hashtags)

We of course make light of the trivial since we have so much to be grateful for, and sometimes take for granted – great schools, safe community, premier residential living – but I also want to make sure I have your undivided attention. I want to stress again the importance of being involved, and request your help with increasing the level of engagement community-wide.

We do have serious issues that need our continued focus beyond traffic congestion, such as the opioid epidemic that is threatening our entire nation. This epidemic affects young people in our schools, the millennials, and professionals at nearly every level.

I'm proud of the effort our Police Department is undertaking to work with surrounding agencies and organizations from the local level to the state level on how to best combat this threat to our nation.

Too many lives are being lost and impacted by this epidemic and we must work together and take a firm stand to help those in need and hold those, who push this disease, accountable for their actions.

Your continued involvement, as a community, will not only help us face our greatest challenges and threats, but will also help us overcome them together. Stay tuned, stay involved, and encourage those around you to do the same. I am confident we can get this done together.

If you don't think you can make a difference, then think again. Just ask Anand.

From one individual resident starting out on his own to a group of residents coming together to help build an entire plan for the future of our city, to the young people throughout Johns Creek volunteering and

creating ways to make this world a better place, we should all be optimistic about our future.

The pride and love for our city that our residents continuously display energizes me each and every day, and I hope it will do the same for all of you.

I understand and respect that we all have busy lives but in what sometimes feels like a blink of an eye, decisions can be made that you or some of your neighbors might not agree with or like, and be seemingly made without you even being aware. However, I can assure you that none of these decisions are being made in a vacuum.

Our City Council meetings, where each of these decisions are made, are live streamed and available to the public both during and afterwards. The City Staff goes to great lengths to notify the public through many proactive measures. However, I get it, and I have been doing this long enough to understand that we normally don't hear from you, unless you are not happy. Which, fortunately is not that often.

The flip side to that is our community is generally so satisfied with most aspects of our City that we don't hear from enough of them often enough.

So this brings me to the "State of the City." From where I sit, I say it is pretty darn strong.

While I am very content with where we are as a community today, and optimistic about our future, I am not satisfied. And I'm not quite sure that I ever will be. But that's ok. It means that I recognize there is still so much more for us to do to together in order to help ensure our future is even brighter tomorrow than we can even imagine it today.

And I take comfort in knowing that I am not alone with this line of thinking. I am surrounded by hard-working, passionate, and dedicated City Council members who share in this same overarching goal.

We have a highly experienced staff who take both an innovative and dedicated approach when it comes to working with our City Council and our community to shape the plans that will elevate our exceptional City to even greater heights.

And finally, we have a community of over achieving residents who continually participate in the process of planning for the next steps of our future, which keeps us driving forward.

Together, I am confident we will continue to achieve great things for the City of Johns Creek. Together, we will continue to set the standard by which other communities will measure greatness. And together, I believe we will forge a legacy that truly defines what premier residential living means.

As I close today's State of the City Address, I can think of no better words – and challenge for each of us here today – than the inspirational quote by the Pakistani young woman, Malala Yousafzai, who survived an assassination attempt at the hands of the Taliban, for speaking up for the desire to have a better life, that so many of us take for granted.

While the context of the quote for a brighter future is vastly different, the sentiment is very much relevant to anyone who looks to the future to seek a better life for themselves, or for their family.



As we leave here this morning, let us carry Malala’s words with us to serve as inspiration not only for a better tomorrow for our own community, but for how we live our lives each day as well....“Let us make our future now, and let us make our dreams tomorrow's reality.”

Thank you.