

## STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

It has been an honor to serve as your mayor this year and I am mindful of the responsibilities as the leader of this community. Each week there are important decisions to be made but these decisions are not mine alone. As mayor, I have a role in these decisions but I also depend on my council for advice and support. Mrs. Marie Beiser, Mr. Bob Clark, Mr. P.K. Martin, and Mr. Tony Powell will help me determine the needs of Lawrenceville and set a course for the direction of the city.

I want to thank the council, including former member Katie Hart Smith, for its help this past year and look forward to our work together this year as we strive to make Lawrenceville the best county seat in Georgia.

I always strive to begin my day by counting my blessings. The greatest blessing I have is my faith and I pray every day for our city and my role in the decisions of the day. We have the blessing of living in this great nation, this great state, this great county and this great city. We are blessed to have men and women who protect us each day both home and abroad. I am blessed to have family and friends who support me in the many activities associated with this office. I am equally blessed to have a staff who also seeks the best for our city. Time does not allow me to name everyone but I do want to mention two employees. Bob Baroni, who is our city manager, has served with 8 mayors. He has a wealth of knowledge and I am grateful for his expertise in the functions of the city.

Bob always makes time in his schedule to meet with me to discuss city issues. I have been told by other city officials that Bob is an asset to the city and I agree. Donna Wiernik is our accountant and oversees an 85 million dollar budget. She insures the financial accounting is done according to procedure. Her role in keeping up with revenues and expenses encompasses many hours of work. We have 254 employees in the City of Lawrenceville. We have a trained workforce from the police officers who put their lives on the line each day to the people in our support offices who carry on the functions of the city. These people are the reasons I can say that the City of Lawrenceville is a great city in which to live.

Our economy brings challenges on all levels but there are blessings of living in the City of Lawrenceville.

We are part of the best public school system in the United States. The Gwinnett County Public Schools won the Broad Prize for national excellence. Georgia Gwinnett College, the college of the future, lies within our city limits and Gwinnett Technical College is just outside our city. We have the advantage of having our students stay in Gwinnett County and obtain a great education from kindergarten to the awarding of a college degree. Just recently the council honored a young lady from Jenkins Elementary School who won a national award in art.

Gwinnett Medical Center is also within our city limits. This hospital is considered to be one of the best healthcare systems in the country. The opening of the Strickland heart building, named for a City of Lawrenceville resident, now affords our citizens the convenience of expert medical care.

We have our Gwinnett County government in the middle of our city. Chairman Charlotte Nash is to be commended for her leadership of the County Commission. I have had the opportunity to work with her on several intergovernmental agreements and she is an exceptional leader with a great mind. She is a blessing to this county and a role model for future leaders.

Our downtown is home to the Gwinnett County Historic Courthouse, the Aurora theatre, and many unique shops and restaurants. The Gwinnett County Historic Courthouse houses our veterans' museum, which brings visitors to our city from all over the United States. The Aurora theatre brings first productions to the stage and has over 5,000 visitors during the Christmas season. Visitors come to Lawrenceville to check out the uniqueness of shops with such names as Sparkles, Magnolias, Aristocrats, Lona Gallery to name a few and restaurants with the unique names of Sweets on the Square, Oyster Bay, Local Republic, and the Singing Bean.

The City of Lawrenceville's millage rate of 2.16 is one of the lowest in the county. The city supports the Quality of Life unit that strives to keep our neighborhoods strong and vibrant. We have a diverse community but a community which desires to be known as a great community in which to live, work and play.

During this past year, there have been several accomplishments for the city.

We opened the Mahlon Burson Water Treatment Plant. This Plant will have the ability to produce one million gallons of water per day. Two governors have sent letters to all water systems instructing them to find an alternative source of water. Lawrenceville is doing just that. Although the city will never be independent of county water, we can reduce the amount of water that is needed from the county.

Our Downtown Development Authority completed the city's signage project. There are new entrances into the gateways of our cities with new signage for the downtown area. The ongoing projects which have begun are the Heritage Trail, connecting Rhodes Jordan Park to the Justice Center, the College Connectivity Project, connecting Georgia Gwinnett College to the downtown area, the pedestrian crosswalk connecting the parking deck to the opposite side of Crogan Street, and the new park which will be adjacent to Luckie and Jackson Streets. The old depot at the railroad is another historic building that now has a tenant.

We have approved two TAD districts. One district stretches from Georgia Gwinnett College to the railroad tracks. The other TAD district stretches from Hwy 316 to the downtown along Pike Street. We have put these districts in place in order to encourage future development along these corridors.

We continue to strengthen our staff to prepare for the future. We have hired an assistant accountant, an assistant IT technician, and a code enforcement officer.

Although we like to mention our accomplishments, we also must mention our challenges.

Of course, the biggest challenge is the fight of the airport expansion. The city hired an aviation attorney to help protect the interests of the City of Lawrenceville. I have attended the work sessions, public meetings and citizen review committee meetings regarding the airport and have spoken at several of these meetings. Bob Clark has been in attendance at the committee meeting and Tony Powell is a member of the Citizen Committee. I have sent our aviation attorney all documents related to the airport expansion and he has provided advice to our attorney in the fight against the expansion. The previous administration passed a resolution against the expansion of the airport and this administration will issue a similar resolution in the near future. The fight against the airport expansion cannot just be through resolutions of the mayor and council. The City of Lawrenceville citizens need to continue to express their concerns to the Board of Commissioners.

At the beginning of my term in January of 2011, I informed the city through an address of this type of the monetary sanctions placed on our city by the Public Service Commission due to problems associated with our gas department. Those sanctions placed a three million dollar blanket over the city. After meeting with the Public Service Commission during the first few months, the city was asked to comply with 17 mandates. The City has made significant changes to the gas department operations. The city has hired a gas superintendent and two associate superintendents as well as foremen and technicians. This week the city will submit a letter to the Public Service Commission showing we have completed the requirements related to three of the GUFBA mandates, which carried a 1.1 million dollar fine. The letter requests the Public Service Commission to close the consent order and eliminate the fine.

We have completed 95% of other 14 mandates and look to have a final inspection within the next month to close those consent orders and reduce the related fines. I want to commend our staff and attorneys for their work with the Public Service Commission to complete these mandates.

At the beginning of my term, an audit was done from an outside firm. The firm of Moore, Stephens, and Tiller made their report in September. The audit showed areas in which the city needs to make improvements to better our operations. We are in the process of taking their recommendations and making appropriate changes to continue to improve our performance.

The City's financial position remains strong in spite of the economy. Department heads have responded to the current economic situation by reducing their budgets accordingly. The City utility department continues to have some of the lowest gas and electric rates in the State. Currently the tax rate for 2012-13 is projected to remain at the current rate of 2.16 mils.

The City anticipates reduced property tax revenue due to the reduction in property tax evaluations. This trend is anticipated to continue for several more years. Fortunately our tax revenue does not account for a significantly large percentage for our total budget.

One budget component that we are monitoring is health care cost. In light of many of Obama-care provisions, we will have little or no control over many of the new regulations and associated costs. Real costs will not be known until 2012. However the cost of the new benefits is expected to rise annually.

The City has the challenge of strengthening our economy. We continue to work with Partnership Gwinnett to strengthen our economic environment. We have welcomed new businesses into our city during the last six months. Each new business has expressed an interest in becoming involved in the community. This year we will review our code of ordinances whereby we look at the effectiveness of those ordinances in our business and residential community.

Transportation and water continue to be the most important infrastructure areas that require attention. We must continue to address conservation and wise use of water.

In the transportation area, our local SPLOST program has funded substantial improvements. This summer we have an opportunity to consider a regional sales tax which will give the city more money to invest in city transportation projects as well as improve regional transportation.

The Service Delivery Strategy also represents a challenge. The cities and county have been unable to negotiate a service delivery agreement as required by State law. Chairman Charlotte Nash has made great progress in working with the cities to solve this dispute.

In conclusion, although there are challenges ahead, the city has made progress in many areas during the past year. You as citizens owe this accomplishment to your council members and the staff. We will not sit still. We will continue to meet challenges head on. We still have the vision to make Lawrenceville the buzz word when someone is looking for a great city in which to live, work, and play.

I am appreciative of the citizens and their contribution to our city. I hope you will continue to be involved in our meetings and continue to talk with myself and the council. My prayer is for all residents to be appreciative of the council and the employees of the city. We are just like you, trying to do our job each day and make the best decision for the benefit of all citizens.

Thank you. May God continue to bless you and the United States of America.

Mayor Judy Jordan Johnson  
City of Lawrenceville  
January 9, 2012