



## State of the County Address Delivered by Chairman Laura Semanson February 19, 2020

Good afternoon everybody. Thank you all for being here. I'd like to give special thanks again to the Forsyth County Chamber and to the South Forsyth Rotary Club for hosting us here today. I'd also like to recognize my fellow commissioners who are all here and all the elected officials that we recognized earlier. We're going to be able to hear from Commissioners Molly Cooper, Dennis Brown, Cindy Mills and Todd Levent in a just little bit. And also our senior staff and Eric Johnson, our County Manager, are all here to support us in this endeavor.

As a quick point of order, I'd like to call this special meeting of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners to order. It is now 12:24 and ask my colleagues if there is a motion to adopt our agenda. We have a motion and a second. All in favor say "ay", any opposed? It is unanimous. Our agenda is adopted. And that is a little departure from the way we've done things in the past because we are going to bring everybody up here on stage and engage with the crowd and answer some questions collectively. So we will be convening as a board.

In the meantime, on behalf of my colleagues, the county employees, and everyone in this room I would like to say thank you to the residents of Forsyth County for the opportunity to serve you. It is a pleasure; it's an honor.

When preparing for the 2020 State of the County address, I tried to reflect on exactly what it meant – to talk about the 'state of our county.' In a community as dynamic as Forsyth County, each moment brings something new. The state of the county is one of growth, of change, and

of maturing as the home to over 236,000 people and 7,600 businesses, large and small, and everything in between.

When we look at where we are today, it's important to understand how we got here. Once a sleepy, rural community on the outskirts of the outskirts of Atlanta, the region's growth and the completion of Georgia 400 brought challenges and opportunities right to our doorstep. On the shores of Lake Lanier, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, and with a freeway to the big city, Forsyth County was discovered by tens of thousands of families, like mine and like many of yours, who came to seek this great quality of life that we have here in Forsyth County. And as they came, family farms gave way to subdivisions, and Forsyth County became the most desirable bedroom community in the metropolitan area.

But as time has marched on, we again find ourselves in transition. We continue to evolve, we're welcoming more and more commercial investment with a strong focus on economic development to bring jobs and balance to our taxes. And as we grow, our residents seek to establish and maintain distinct senses of place, as seen in areas like South Forsyth and Coal Mountain. Design and development standards and county ordinances continue to be refined to not only help develop that sense of place, but also ensure quality, value and long-term viability.

So where are we now? 2019 was an amazing year in Forsyth County. There were many significant announcements and events that improved the quality of life for our residents, for our employees, for those who work, live and play here in the county.

In the video that you all saw during lunch, I hope you were able to catch a glimpse of what some of these announcements that were made, what some of the events were. And a few stats from 2019 will bring it home.

- Our engineering department resurfaced 168 roads last year, for a total of 57 miles.
- Our library system saw almost 717 thousand visitors, with over 2.8 million items checked out.
- An estimated 1.9 million visitors enjoyed our county parks.
- Almost 700 dogs and cats found a forever home.
- Residents brought 19 hundred tons of materials to our recycling convenience centers.
- We registered over ten thousand new voters

Our community benefits from a wonderful public safety system.

- The 911 Center handled over 81 thousand calls.
- Our fire department responded to almost 15 thousand incidents.
- And our Sheriff's Office answered over 223 thousand calls for service.

And this doesn't even begin to touch the surface of all the great things that make the state of our county so strong.

A few weeks ago, my fellow commissioners shared their reflections on 2019 and what they are looking forward to in 2020. So, if you'll indulge me, we have some brief video to review.

All of these are evidence of the growth, change and maturity that is occurring in our community. And it doesn't stop there.

We are continuing to see road improvements and pedestrian projects completed across the county. We made significant strides on our building and design standards, as well as tree, mass grading, and stormwater ordinances to protect the character and environmental quality of our community. In 2019 Forsyth County received the highest bond ratings possible from all three major bond rating agencies, joining a select group of state and local governments.

Several of our county departments received state and national recognition for excellence, including our Shakerag Water Reclamation Facility being named "Plant of the Year" from the Georgia Association of Water Professionals. Our Emergency Management Agency was

recognized by the National Weather Service for our storm preparedness. For our employees, the county opened a new Health and Wellness Center that was aimed at improving healthcare access and reducing costs.

We saw increased focus on growth in the commercial sector. In the area of economic development, we continued to execute our five-year strategic plan, and last spring formally unveiled Forward Forsyth – a partnership of Forsyth county government, Forsyth County Schools, the Chamber of Commerce, Lanier Technical College and the Development Authority. We've been working that plan, and have been reaping the rewards, including the announcements of more than 115 million dollars of capital investment and over eleven-hundred jobs last year. We have seen not only an increase in the quantity of projects, but also the quality of them in terms of investment and salaries. And the news for 2020? We're on track for an even stronger year, with a full pipeline of opportunities.

In 2020, the county will continue to enhance the services and amenities our residents are asking for. The passage of SPLOST 8 will help to fund further improvements to our community assets. Our community's beloved greenway will see much needed renovations, as well as continued construction to increase access to a larger section of the county. Lanierland will see an expansion, including a new Miracle League field and inclusive playground. Those are just a few of the projects coming.

In the area of transportation, the completion of widening projects on Sharon Road, Brookwood Road and Union Hill Road were key projects in 2019, bringing much needed relief to our residents. We completed sidewalks along Trammel, Nuckolls, Echols and Samples Roads, as well as at Old Atlanta and Melody Mizer Lane. In 2020, we expect to be underway with more improvements, including the interchange at 369 and 400, Ronald Reagan Boulevard extension, and widening of Old Atlanta Road. And we have multiple other projects that are in the design phase. These projects will help alleviate congestion and increase mobility on our roadways.

In 2020, we're focused on continuing to engage our residents in charting our future. We're focused on delivering the solutions you're asking for. We're communicating like never before, on all types of social platforms. Last year, our Insight2Forsyth project went live, simplifying access to development related information. In 2020, we're bringing even more transparency with access to electronic meeting agendas. We're enhancing customer service with a new 311 system for reporting, routing, responding to, and tracking resident inquiries.

As you can see, our current state is ever changing, and I believe it's positive change. We have 20/20 vision, and our sights are on our future.

Thank you.

Yesterday was just a really incredible day for Forsyth County. Something that has happened since we planned this presentation. Yesterday morning, the entire day, was an example of collaboration and how when we work together, we can forward Forsyth's future. We started early at the capital with our state delegation hosting us, getting us in front of GDOT, in front of EPD and in front of the governor himself. We had a great opportunity to meet with them and discuss the concerns we have here in Forsyth County and work specifically on issues we have facing our county with these agencies.

I'm appreciative of all our state legislators. We came home from that to face our individual meetings and our work session where we discussed the future. We talked about planning initiatives and understand how growth in this county is going to occur. And then we wrapped up the day going to the Sheriff's awards which was an incredible opportunity for us to see those in this community really see what it means to put service above self. It was a truly special day in Forsyth County where we all worked together. And it makes the dream work.

At this time, I would like to invite my fellow commissioners to join me. We have received some questions from you, and we thought having all of us available to respond would help provide that higher level of engagement that we are looking to achieve. Thank you to James McCoy for moderating our discussion

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Thank you, James. And thank you to those who submitted the questions – we hope you are as enthusiastic about where our community is headed as we are.

Is there a motion to adjourn the special called meeting? The meeting is adjourned at 1:05 p.m.