

State of the County
Remarks for Chairman Michael D. Page
6th Annual State of the County Address
February 13, 2012
7p.m.

Good evening and welcome to the Durham County State of the County Address. For several years, we have presented this informative report to our community to reflect on our successes primarily, and to review key issues that may be coming forward for our community over the next few months.

I'd like to also extend greetings to my fellow Board members, County Manager Mike Ruffin and his administrative staff, our Department Heads and employees, my fellow citizens, those who are in the chambers and those who may be viewing this address on television, or the Internet.

It has been my personal privilege and honor to chair the Durham Board of County Commissioners, and to deliver the annual State of the County address for the past 4 years.

This evening, my goal is to briefly talk about the great work that has gone on over this past year, and to detail an exciting effort for Durham County Government that will guide our future budgets and our service delivery into the future....our Strategic Plan.

We see our Durham community as a place where citizens feel free to share opinions and debate issues fully. A recent national accolade amplifies what we have always known. Last month, Durham was nationally recognized as the number one most tolerant city in our country. We competed against New York, Seattle, San Francisco and other cities with populations greater than 250 thousand. We were noted with other urban centers as being a “haven for tolerance”. Several qualities were rated highly including the racial diversity of our population, strong anti- discrimination laws, as well as our community’s religious tolerance. Congratulations Durham!

High performing organizations succeed because of the vision, commitment and qualifications of its leaders. Durham County is highly regarded for its outstanding elected and appointed officials, and this year we experienced some noteworthy changes.

My long term colleague Commissioner Becky Heron, who served this county faithfully beginning in 1982, announced her retirement in August. Following a comprehensive vetting process, our board appointed Commissioner Pam Karriker to serve out the term of office that ends this fall. Pam let me commend you for jumping into this job

with both feet, and for the fresh perspective you have brought to our Board's work.

Another longtime elected leader, Durham County Sheriff Worth Hill announced he was taking off his badge at the end of the year. Again our Board was charged with appointing a new official to fill out a remaining term of office. We appointed then Chief Deputy Mike Andrews as the new Durham County Sheriff. As you know Sheriff Andrews took office in January and appointed Don Ladd as his Chief Deputy. Stan Harris was promoted to Captain and appointed to head Patrol and Communications in the department. I am confident they will lead the department with dedication, commitment and enthusiasm.

On the administrative side of our government, Durham County witnessed two Deputy County Managers leave our ranks, and two new Deputy Managers were selected by the County Manager. Former Human Resources Director Marqueta Welton was appointed in June and Lee Worsley, previously Assistant County Manager from Catawba County joined us in October. Together they represent a strong anchor for our organization.

I am always impressed to see that Durham County's leaders and employees receive many local and national awards each year, and last year was no exception.

Vice Chairman Ellen Reckhow was appointed to the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Board of Directors and reappointed as Chair of the Intergovernmental Relations committee. Commissioner Brenda Howerton received the "Master" status from the Local Elected Leaders Academy, sponsored by the UNC School of Government.

County Attorney Lowell Siler was elected President of the North Carolina Association of County Attorneys.

Gayle Harris, Durham County Public Health Director was named president of the North Carolina Public Health Association.

Willie Covington, our Register of Deeds was honored with the Archives Award from the Federation of Genealogical Societies for exceptional contributions in archival access, and preservation of original historical documents.

Durham Center Director Ellen Holliman and Mental Health Board member Earl Phillips were honored by the NC Council of Community Programs. Holliman got the prestigious “Allan D. Spader Award” for collaborative work statewide to improve Mental Health. Phillips received the “Emerging Leadership Award” for an Area Board member for his effective advocacy.

In addition, the Durham Center was honored with two statewide “Program of Excellence Awards.” Durham Center Access was recognized as a Program of Excellence in the Crisis Response category. And the Durham Center Access Assessment Team was recognized as a Program of Excellence for Partnerships to Improve Services.

The Durham County Tax Office received an Employee Productivity Award from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. Our team, led by Tax Administrator Kim Simpson, was selected for the License Plate Recognition Technology Project, which allows deputies in the field to identify vehicles with delinquent taxes. We are the first in the state with this technology.

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners recognized our "Computers 4 Kids" program with its Outstanding County Program Award. This award is presented to innovative county programs that other counties might want to duplicate. "Computers for Kids" is a partnership with Durham Public Schools, United Way of the Greater Triangle and the Volunteer Center of Durham, and is housed in the Department of Social Services. In addition, Aaron Stone of our IT department was also recognized with an award by the UNC School of Government's technology-based innovation awards program for his work on Computers 4 Kids.

The Triangle Business Journal selected Durham County Government as one of the winners of its first 2011 Healthiest Employers awards, specifically for our wellness programs that help employees identify and manage chronic illnesses. Thanks to Diane Pearson of Human Resources for managing our wellness program. Just a point of personal privilege, I'd like to thank Elaine Hyman, our interim Human Resources Director for enthusiastically promoting our wellness program and for her long-term leadership with the county. Elaine will retire at the end of the month.

Finally, our Board of Commissioners received the 2011 County Commissioners Award from the North Carolina School Boards Association for the commissioners' outstanding support of public education. That group honors one Board of Commissioners each year at its annual conference. Please join me in saluting these outstanding individuals and departments for their meritorious work.

You've already heard some examples of professional accolades that our employees received in 2011. That tells us that we have an outstanding workforce. Let me say I am also impressed by the work that our employees do to help others. In addition to providing hands on mentoring and volunteering, our employees make a strong statement with their financial resources by supporting the least among us.

Despite the fact that salaries remained flat for the past 3 years, our employees contributed in excess of \$80,000 to our "County Cares Campaign". The actual goal was \$75,000. In addition to supporting United Way of the Greater Triangle, our employees choose to expand their charitable reach and to lend support to 4 other nonprofit organizations. Durham Rescue Mission, John Avery Boys & Girls Club, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Susan G. Komen-NC Triangle Affiliate all received funding.

I'd like to thank Nina Bullock of the County Attorney's office for leading our new federated campaign, County Cares.

Gone are the days of a robust economic engine that was the hallmark of our community. Economists are still predicting a sluggish economic recovery for North Carolina overall in 2012. Local governments, and indeed governments at all levels, are managing in a new economic climate. We are seeing a recovery at work, but one that is moving much more slowly than we'd hoped for.

Nevertheless, Durham County continues to provide the services that are needed and expected by our citizens. During our budget process, Manager Ruffin and his staff presented a budget that was lean, but still able to address our community's needs and priorities. Department heads downsized their requests, while being careful to maintain the integrity of their services. We eliminated grant-funded positions and realigned our goals.

Thankfully, our Tax Department continued its aggressive collections and despite the downturn, they collected a very positive 98.88% of taxes for this period.

Our Board made adequate support of Durham Public Schools a priority by fully funding their request of \$110.1 million dollars. We continued to partner with 42 local nonprofit agencies by awarding \$853,667 to those organizations for service delivery. Such agencies help extend the reach of our human services, and fill in some gaps between the levels of services that the county provides and unmet community needs. At the end of the process, our Board approved a budget with no property tax increase from the previous year. As we move into this year, we continue to look for new sources of revenue as we plan for the upcoming budget.

Moody's Investors Service reaffirmed Durham County's top-notch credit rating, after a special review was conducted. The special review was fallout from the nation's credit being downgraded last summer. Moody's reviewed some local governments' dependence on federal money, the amount of variable-rate debt they carried, and how much they held in reserve funds. Durham County's AAA rating is intact. A triple A rating allows Durham County to borrow money at the lowest rates available which is a tremendous benefit to our taxpayers.

Certainly we are not fully out of the economic storm, but there are some encouraging signs. In this economy the watchword continues to be jobs for our community. Our economic development partners at the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Durham and Downtown Durham Inc. are second to none. Our winning team continues to aggressively pursue those companies that are a good fit for our community.

Our Board of Commissioners awarded \$225 thousand dollars in incentives to Syngenta Biotechnology for its \$70 million dollar expansion. This new 147,000 square foot research and development complex will certainly provide a tremendous economic boost to the Durham community and its tax base.

AW North Carolina, located in Treyburn, received \$2 million dollars worth of incentives from Durham County a few years back. Fast forward and you will note that the company is still paying dividends in our community well beyond that initial investment. Despite the economic downturn and the hit to the automotive industry, it currently has about 1,400 people at work thanks to a \$100 million dollar expansion that created more jobs for local workers. Workers laid off during the downturn have now been rehired. That expansion included a new

production line crafting transmissions and related parts thanks to the uptick in sales of Toyotas.

Our region continues to be competitive because of scientific and technological innovations. President Barack Obama again visited our Cree LED lighting company in the summer to stress the importance of science and technology, and to emphasize jobs and competitiveness in those areas. Cree is another company that has received economic development funds from Durham County for its initial investment and an expansion.

The President's visit coincided with the meeting of his Council on Jobs and Competitiveness which held several meetings at various locations here in Durham County and the region. I'd like to express my sincere thanks to the members of our Sheriff's Department, Emergency Medical Services and Emergency Management who worked with the President's logistical team to ensure an incident free visit.

A strong economy must be supported by education and transportation. Our Board voted to use available legislation to seek an increase in our local sales and use tax to support these two areas. In November,

Durham County voters approved two sales tax referenda to benefit education and transit. The quarter cent sales and use tax for education will be collected starting this April and will help Durham Public Schools, Durham Technical Community College and the Partnership for Children. According to our estimates the tax will annually produce about \$9.2 million dollars. Of that, Durham Public Schools will receive about 6.1 million dollars to help maintain jobs for school-based personnel and an additional \$2 million dollars to pay debt on recently built school facilities.

Durham Technical Community College will receive \$825,000 to award need based scholarships to Durham Public School graduates and to Durham residents who seek career training, or retraining. Finally, Durham's Partnership for Children will be provided with nearly \$400,000 to support Transition to Kindergarten, a partnership program with Durham Public Schools which builds a seamless transition to help our youngest children prepare to enter kindergarten.

Our Board decided that the approved ½ cent Transit Tax will not be collected until either Wake or Orange County voters approve it. The enabling legislation essentially called for a triangle wide comprehensive transit plan that includes enhanced bus service, commuter rail and finally a light rail system for the entire area. If the two counties do not approve the transit tax, our board will work on a plan to provide more buses and

routes in Durham along with faster and more reliable service in the short term.

In both cases, the taxes are not collected on food and other essentials.

You need only to look outside this window to see that we continue to change the landscape of downtown with new construction. The Justice Center construction continues on schedule. We held a topping out ceremony for the facility last spring as the final floor was erected. The courthouse building will be completed in late summer with move in set for early 2013.

The first phase of our Human Services Complex on Main Street was completed allowing our Public Health Department and Durham Center to move in the spring. An open house for the two departments was held on May 4. As you drive by you will see that construction is now underway on Phase Two of the building and our Social Services Department will join them next year.

Durham County Engineering's Project Management Division also managed the completion of Phase I and II of the Fiber Optic Connectivity project, major improvements to our Information

Technology Department on the 5th floor of the administrative building, and the Justice Center Parking Deck which is now open for use.

Durham County remains committed to sustainability. Two more of our facilities were awarded LEED Certifications: A Silver award for the Durham County Criminal Justice Resource Center major renovation project which reopened a year ago, and a Gold Certification for the new South Regional Library. We now have a total of seven LEED Certified buildings.

Just a week ago, our community was horrified to learn that a 4 year old boy accidentally shot himself with an improperly stored firearm in his own home. This is just one of many unfortunate cases in our community where a hand gun caused injury or death.

Although our Sheriff's department has reported a 12% drop in crime in the unincorporated area of Durham County in 2011, the fact remains that our overall community continues to wage an unending battle against too many injuries and deaths caused by firearms.

Last month Commissioners Reckhow, Howerton and I joined Mayor Bell, Sheriff Mike Andrews, Police Chief José Lopez, court officials

and others in bringing a new laser focus on reducing gun violence in our community. One new initiative calls for collaboratively working to seek higher bonds for those charged with crimes involving guns. Our chief district court judge and our chief superior court judge are reviewing the limits of bonds that can be set for those who use guns in the commission of a crime.

Another goal which comes as a recommendation from the Durham Crime Cabinet, is to raise the issue with members of our General Assembly and seek harsher penalties for people convicted on gun related offenses. We will align our legislative efforts to seek appropriate changes.

Durham County's Office of the Sheriff is at the forefront of the fight to reduce gun violence throughout the community. The office is partnering with the Durham Police Department to help reduce criminal activity in Northeast Central Durham. The Sheriff's Anti Crime/Narcotics unit is targeting criminals who are illegally selling or distributing guns by collaborating with Agents from ATF. This initiative has resulted in several recent arrests and the seizure of weapons. Staff is working with the District Attorney's Office to bring about successful and meaningful prosecution.

In addition to many other initiatives, the Sheriff is exploring the implementation of a juvenile based program to address gun violence, and targeting juveniles who have been identified as needing extra attention from Law Enforcement. This program will involve our Detention Center staff and the Medical Examiner's Office to show the results of gun violence. Certainly, we are bringing a multipronged approach to this critical issue. Our residents must feel safe, and all of us must work together to significantly reduce gun crimes in Durham.

Last year when I delivered this message, we had just started developing our Durham County Strategic initiative. I announced the mission and vision that our Board had unanimously crafted as a critical first step to the process. After that first step, a great deal of work has moved forward to begin to put flesh on the bones of this extensive process.

At this point, I'm going direct your attention to the screen and let our County Manager Mike Ruffin summarize our Strategic Initiative, the plan that will guide Durham County forward for the next 3 -5 years. Mr. Ruffin.

[A 3 minute pre-recorded message, the Durham County Strategic Planning Process Update, presented by County Manager Mike Ruffin shown here.]

Our Board received the final report of the strategic initiative last Monday at our work session. Our agenda this evening sets the stage for our Board to formally approve the plan and to move forward with full implementation.

Just to emphasize, our plan has five key goals:

- **Goal One** - Community and Family prosperity and enrichment
- **Goal Two** - Health and well being for all
- **Goal Three** - Safe and secure community
- **Goal Four** - Environmental stewardship
- **And Goal Five** - Accountable, efficient and visionary government.

Included with these goals and definitions are specific outcome measures, and initiatives which will support each goal. This plan is dynamic.

Expect that some programs will go away and be replaced with different initiatives.

Over the next few years, County Manager Mike Ruffin and his departments and staff will work to ensure that we meet those goals. More important than producing the plan is ensuring that it is implemented throughout all our departments appropriately.

In addition to our consultants Zelos, I'd like to recognize Dr. Tyrone Baines and Michael Palmer, former interim deputy county manager, for their unique perspectives, and tremendous insights shared while working as consultants on this initiative. They understand the needs and the heartbeat of our community in a way that has been invaluable in moving this process forward.

Our strategic initiative will reinforce our desire to be a well managed government that is customer focused, accountable and efficient. We encourage our entire community to buy into our vision and mission. When we produce the first document, I encourage you to get a copy, look it over and make sure we are doing what we said we would do. As we move forward, we will provide annual updates.

In closing, let me say that I am confident that Durham County will continue to meet the needs of its residents and will continue to be one of our state's most innovative and productive local governments.

Thank you so much for your attention this evening. Now let's get to work!