



STATE OF THE COMMUNITY

FEBRUARY 13, 2020

As most of you know, my tenure as Mayor will come to an end in December 2020, and as I see the signs for my exit beginning to appear already, I think it appropriate to use the analogy of an automobile trip on the Interstate to reflect on the road we've traveled, and how far we have come. As we approach my "exit", we need to recognize that **this is not our final destination**, and we also need to consider **not just** how far we've come, **but also** where we are headed next, after we stop to "change drivers" so to speak.

There is an election for all members of the Macon-Bibb Commission coming up on May 19th, and the qualifying time for that election is the first week of March, so we'll know for sure who's running for what by noon on Friday, March 6th. I will, in my comments today, talk about the road our community has been traveling the past 12 years and suggest some questions that **you** should ask the candidates. These are not endorsements or criticism, but as you'll see, we've come a long way and our citizens deserve the continuation of this journey in order to move our entire community "forward together".

I want to thank the Chamber of Commerce for organizing this State of the Community address and providing all of us the opportunity to look back at previous years and look forward to envision what we want to come next. I also want to thank the sponsors for making this event possible.

Thank you, Members of the Macon-Bibb Commission, for being here today; please stand and be recognized for you have been a part of all of the successes we'll discuss today.

Also, I want to recognize and publicly thank our Department Heads who are here today. Please stand, as we owe you a debt of gratitude for all that you do each and every day to keep our community running. You took consolidation to heart...you believed in this community's success...and you've worked tirelessly to improve it, maintain it, build it and protect it. THANK YOU!

Finally, if you would permit me to take a point of personal privilege, I want to thank my family and my law firm of Anderson, Walker & Reichert, LLP for their support during these last 12 years. My wife, Dele, especially, is looking forward to December 2020 when I get out of politics, and she can say what's really on her mind without hurting my feelings! Happy Valentine's Day Sweetheart!

But now, let's think back to December 2007 when I was inaugurated as Mayor of Macon, and I inherited a negative fund balance and the nation was sliding into the deepest recession we've had since the Great Depression. I gave an inaugural address, the title of which was "MOVE ON; MOVE IN; MOVE UP, MACON", and basically the theme was **to work together as a community** to solve our problems and create a more attractive, livable community. That has remained the central

theme of my administration, and I still believe that **a more attractive and livable community is the key to our future success.**

This won't be easy, but the road we've traveled thus far hasn't been without bumps and detours either. We've had to stop several times for re-fueling and re-election in 2011, 2013, and 2016, but we have made remarkable progress, when you think about it, and in my opinion, the State of Our Community is **VIBRANT!** I say this because the definition of vibrant is "energetic, pulsating with energy, resonant, and bright".

Also, I say this because we have we have made some **good things happen**, we have worked together **better than ever before**; and we, as a community, are working together for the future, and collectively, **we believe the best is yet to come!**

Let's look at these three areas "good, better, and best" in a little more detail and see if you reach the same conclusion:

GOOD THINGS HAVE HAPPENED!

- Downtown Macon has come to life; a Phoenix has risen from the ashes of decades of disinvestment and businesses moving out; NewTown Macon has incentivized the development of 651 loft apartments, 51 restaurants, and 26 taverns. Property values in the downtown area were up 9%, resulting in \$1.4 Million of new property tax income, and those numbers will continue to grow! Where before, there were only a handful of places open on Cherry and Mulberry Streets, we now have multiple centers of activity across multiple streets...with more coming. Did anyone think the Christmas

Light Extravaganza would light up, liven up, and revitalize Poplar Street the way that it has?! Kudos to Brian Nichols, the initiator and chief architect of the project, and all the sponsors that brought it to life!

- Thanks to the Urban Development Authority and its Macon Action Plan (MAP for short), we are seeing more activities for people of all ages, more engagement by the people who live, work, and play here, more opportunities to get involved, and more people enjoying all we have to offer. The UDA also has acquired the Dempsey Hotel, rebuilt the streetscape on Cherry St., and transformed the area along Clinton St. in the Mill Hill Arts Village to make a most attractive second entrance into the newly expanded and re-named “Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park,” a soon-to-be nearly 3,000 acre greenspace adjacent to downtown.
- Ask the candidates if they are committed to continued revitalization of Downtown Macon and the first neighborhoods that surround it: not just College Hill and In-Town, but also Pleasant Hill, Main St., Beall’s Hill, Tindall Heights, and Ft. Hill. Inclusion and equity in revitalization efforts builds trust and a sense of community.
- Mercer University has added football and Lacrosse to its list of inter-collegiate sports, the student population has significantly increased, a new Science Center has been erected, and new student housing has been built, connected to the main campus by a pedestrian bridge that is creating a new gateway into downtown. Students travel into downtown and residents from town travel to Mercer for lectures, concerts, and sports events. It is truly a mutually beneficial relationship.

- Ask the candidates if they are committed to transit services, not just along the corridor between Downtown and Mercer University, but also extending to Ocmulgee East Industrial Park, I-75 Business Park, and Sofkee Industrial Park with the thousands of jobs that have been created in those parks.

Modern transit services attract the millennials who are the workforce of tomorrow.

- Speaking of jobs, since 2017, the Macon-Bibb Co. Industrial Authority – leading a team of our economic development partners that includes the Macon Water Authority – has added \$1.3 Billion of new investment and 3,250 new and/or retained jobs with estimated annual payroll in excess of \$90 Million. Amazon, Irving Consumer Products, Embraer, Tyson Foods, Dean Baldwin Aircraft Painting, Star Snacks, Stevens Aerospace, and Nichiha USA and others are huge success stories of which we can **all** be proud.
- Ask the candidates if they are committed to support the work of the Industrial Authority and ask the candidates for Mayor if they are willing to personally serve on the Industrial Authority and invest the time, effort, and energy to participate in a meaningful way.
- The Urban Development Authority has also extended the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail network, and working in collaboration with NewTown Macon they are developing plans to build the Trail from Amerson River Park through the I-16/75 Interchange, into and around Downtown, and south to Walnut Creek and the back entrance to Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. This will create an amenity that will provide miles of multi –

use trail for walking, jogging, or biking and serve as an impetus for economic development, similar to Atlanta's beltline.

- Ask the candidates if they are committed to support the work of the Urban Development Authority and confirm appointments of interested, energetic, and knowledgeable people to serve on that Authority. Our downtown is the Vibrant, Urban Core that serves as the Centerpiece for the Hub City of the Middle Georgia Region, and the Urban Development Authority is a driving force in making that happen!

IT'S BETTER, WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.

While that sounds right, here are 8 examples to confirm that premise:

- 1. We have consolidated the governments of Macon and Bibb County and we have developed a more efficient and effective form of government. After several years of using reserves to finance local government and related programs, we had revenues in excess of expenses this past year and restored \$13 Million to fund balance. Today, 2/3 of our community are paying less taxes than they were prior to consolidation, and our budget this past year was less than the combined budgets of Macon and Bibb Co. prior to consolidation, 6 years ago. Our Department heads deserve a great deal of credit for holding the line on expenses!
- Ask the candidates if they are committed to Consolidation and the continued refinements to make it better. Ask them whether they support adequate funding for libraries, transit services, arts, museums, and quality-of-life programs that build a better community.

- 2. We have unified the citizens of our community into a cohesive core who believe in the future of this community and are willing to work together to achieve desired results. We have built new fire stations, new recreation centers, and additional parks and green space; we have supported quality of life improvements and organizations. These are things that make people want to live here, and that's increasingly important.
- Ask the candidates if they have a plan to improve the sense of community and make equity and inclusion a theme of their administration. Improvements in every part of our community will build trust and confidence in the neighbors who live here. **It's not about "just my area of town"! It's about building community!**
- 3. The new Atrium-Navicent strategic partnership, the new Children's Hospital and the nationally verified Level 1 Trauma Center are creating a **dynamic source of healthcare delivery for Central and South Georgia**. As healthcare becomes increasingly regional in scope, this combination will help make Macon-Bibb Co. a hub for healthcare services.
- 4. We entered into a public-private partnership with Mercer University in which we agreed to build a signature pedestrian bridge over Mercer University Boulevard, and they in turn constructed 300 units of student housing on the other side of the boulevard, which precipitated the construction of a new Marriott Townplace Suites Hotel and adjacent restaurants, for approximately \$50 Million of new investment, the ad valorem taxes on which are paying for the new bridge.

- Ask the candidates if they are in favor of creating additional Tax Allocation Districts which provide an equitable way to pay for infrastructure improvements in a certain District by designating the increase in tax revenues from appreciating values in that district to the payment for those infrastructure improvements.
- 5. Macon-Bibb Co. has designed and is nearing completion of the Second Street Corridor which will connect several different centers of economic activity into a synergistic pattern, where the total economic activity produced will exceed the sum of the parts. It will link the Coliseum and Conference Center, the Government Center, the Business Center, the Medical Center, the Law Enforcement Center, and the Student Center at Mercer University. It will connect Second St. to Mercer University Boulevard and ultimately link I-75 to I-16 with a pedestrian friendly, bicycle friendly, retail friendly complete street!!! That synergy will form the foundation for the vibrant urban core that will serve the Hub City of Middle Georgia!
- 6. Central Georgia Technical College moved two of its major aerospace programs onto Middle Georgia Regional Airport and offered a space sharing arrangement to Robins Air Force Base so that component fabrication operations could be moved out of valuable hangar space on the base. The new Robins North facility offers exciting educational opportunities in a setting where real world aerospace fabrication work is done, mentorships are developed, student participation is allowed as appropriate, and a pathway to a rewarding career is realized and enhanced.

- 7. The Central Georgia Joint Development Authority initially acquired property in South Bibb County to assist RAFB in minimizing residential encroachment in the crash zone and noise contour areas, but subsequently negotiated for the installation of a 650-acre solar array which will add a \$200 million dollar investment in Bibb County and make RAFB the most energy resilient base in the country. This partnership among counties is making our region stronger and more resilient.
- Speaking of the Base...just this morning, we cut the ribbon on its new software engineering facility, located in Downtown Macon next to renovated Capricorn Recording Studios! Software engineering recruits want to be in walkable environment, so the Base chose Downtown Macon, and thanks to a partnership with Mercer, those employees will have access to advanced education degrees.
- 8. And speaking of education...Macon State College was combined with Middle Ga College to form an institution with 5 campuses in 5 counties. That new institution has gone on to attain University status with exciting new post graduate degrees. We partnered with Middle Ga State University to help improve the main entrance to the Macon campus off of Eisenhower Boulevard, and make it safer and more visible from I-475.
- The visibility and international notoriety of Mercer, Wesleyan, Middle Ga. State University and Central Georgia Technical College- and the partnerships they have with us and other organizations- help make Macon-Bibb a hub for higher education.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME:

- We are well on our way to becoming the “Hub City” of the Middle Georgia region, and that needs to continue on an accelerated basis.
- As I have said in previous speeches, a “HUB CITY” is one with a vibrant urban core that offers opportunities not found elsewhere in the region, whether they be in healthcare, higher education, sports, housing, employment, shopping, entertainment, dining, or recreation, and the connectivity to get in and access those opportunities.
- So here we are in the middle of the state, at the intersection of I-16 and I-75/475, the Fall Line Freeway, and the proposed Export-Import Highway, with opportunities in all these categories and more. Currently, the daytime population of Macon-Bibb County swells by about 30,000 people, and many of those folks spend money while they are here. People who stay overnight on business, vacation, or just passing through also make purchases. That generates sales taxes and hotel/motel taxes, without a disproportionate demand for governmental services. Revenue from those taxes has continued to grow, confirming that more people are spending money here, whether they be residents, commuters, travelers just passing through, or tourists coming to visit Macon.
- As for residents, the good news is we have seen continued growth in the property tax digest, which means that their homes are growing in value. That’s a great thing, and when our tax digest increased this past year, we adopted the “roll-back” millage rate.

- And guess what; the vibrant urban core that is being created in the downtown area, is a “walkable” community that is attractive to young people and empty nesters, so they move in and help to provide a workforce pipeline that industry and business looks for, before they make decisions on where to locate. Success builds on itself, and more good jobs and investments bring in more people, which bring in more good jobs and investments!
- Young people moving here and getting jobs will mean families, which leads to a growing and more stable population. We have had estimates of that growth, but NOW, we need to have an accurate count for the 2020 Census which will occur on April 1st, and that’s no joke. The Census will be our official report card and will affect federal financial benefits and legislative re-apportionment. **Be sure to answer the census!**
- So how do we grow the Vibrant Urban Core? Transportation is the key, and the Transit Authority has advised us that they intend to deploy their new electric buses along the Second Street Corridor and go initially from the Coliseum to Mercer University. The charging stations for the electric buses are already being installed, and we hope to see those buses rolling later this year, but that’s just the beginning. I want to see additional buses and the route extended out Mercer University Blvd. and Eisenhower Parkway to Middle Georgia State University; and I want to see it extended out Emery Highway and Ocmulgee East Blvd. to GEICO and the 6,000 employees that they have there. Then in 10 years or less, I want to see a north/south route that will connect Shoppes at River Crossing to Downtown and extend south

to Middle Georgia Regional Airport and Robins AFB. In 20 years or so, I want to see extensions up to Forsyth, over to Gray and Milledgeville, and down to Byron and Ft. Valley, **ALL connecting back to this vibrant urban core in our Downtown.**

- Our Downtown will be able to grow and provide the space necessary to offer the opportunities that people want: affordable housing; good jobs; recreation; green space; restaurants, entertainment, culture, sports, and a river walk, with a unique identity and sense of belonging. It will include an area from I-75 on the west, to Seventh St. on the east, Eisenhower on the South, and Emery Highway on the north.
- I may not live to see it in actuality, but I see the vision for it. And, we are poised to realize it between now and 2050. I believe this plan....to be the “Hub City of Middle Georgia”.... will propel Macon-Bibb Co. to be one of the best places in America to live.
- Ask the candidates what their 30-50 YEAR VISION FOR OUR COMMUNITY is. Our community needs and deserves leaders with a vision that takes more than 4, 8, or 12 years to attain.
- However, please understand that this vision can’t happen with the work of your consolidated government alone; we must all contribute to the effort and move “Forward Together” on this road to our future. Let me say again, **we have not reached our destination.** As much progress as we have made, we have much more work to do, **but we can do it! The State of our Community is VIBRANT!**

- I know we are stronger together; we are better together, and our community deserves us working together to move every person, every street, every neighborhood forward together. **So let's change drivers and get back on the road, and make it happen.**
- THANK YOU, AND MAY GOD BLESS AMERICA