

As prepared for delivery remarks for Dr. Romona Jackson Jones, Chairman of the Douglas County Board of Commissioners' 2022 State of the County Address on Tuesday, April 20, 2022.

Thank you, Council for Quality Growth, and Douglas County Chamber for hosting this exciting occasion in Douglas County for five consecutive years.

Mr. Vice Chairman, Board of Commissioners, Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, County Employees, Volunteers, Community Stakeholders, Clergyman, Veterans, friends, and last but certainly not least the Citizens of Douglas County.

Today, I stand before you as the daughter of a Korean War Paratrooper, to deliver a State of the County address which celebrates our resilience and praises your willingness to stay the course during these unprecedented times. Despite what we've experienced, we the citizens of this great county, have confirmed the unwavering purpose of our presence by merely believing that our setback is a setup for our comeback, and thank God we are still standing!

It is my distinct pleasure to reflect on an unparalleled year as we move forward in a unified manner with renewed strength, grit, and determination. Our yearning for excellence has exceeded the expectations of those who believed otherwise.

Douglas County has become the promised land for progress. Our county is booming with residential and commercial growth, and robust road construction throughout and we have earned our 21st-century bragging rights with billions of dollars in investment from the likes of Google, Amazon, Switch, Microsoft, and many more.

2021 was a year of growth in Douglas County. Our existing businesses added 1000 new jobs, our population grew by 2,000 residents and we had a 9.1% overall business growth. It is only April, but 2022 is off to a great start with the announcement of the Westin Foxhall Resort project commencing, the announcement of a new film production studio, a new data center, and a new food processing facility, and a new advanced manufacturing facility.

Our comeback has set us up for growth, diverse talent, and unimaginable opportunity. Our small businesses are the lifeblood of our community and represent a significant portion of activity related to the economy in the United States and the Douglas County Board of Commissioners is committed to bolstering small business sustainability

To keep the momentum going, we are changing the way we do business in Douglas County. Last January, a partnership between city and county development authorities

and Douglas County Chamber was formalized under one umbrella and called Elevate Douglas.

Elevate Douglas is a public-private partnership that creates one voice for economic development in our county and we are extremely grateful to the pioneers who made this milestone become a reality. Thank you, Chris Pumphrey, Sara Ray, and Board member affiliates, for a job, well done!

Douglas County government's current financial position is impressive and well-positioned to address both current mandates and future initiatives.

Our credit rating of Aa2 from the national rating agencies reflects the disciplined financial framework we have established and the positive outlook for the County. Fund balance Reserves (Rainy Day Fund) totaling \$33,775,075 is 32% of our general fund budget. Since 2019, our balance has grown by 53%. The County has no outstanding taxpayer debt and the county has continued its growth and operating needs within its operating budget.

Special thanks to the federal government for providing Douglas County with \$5.5 million dollars of COVID-19 relief funding and \$28 million dollars of America Rescue Plan Act funding to assist our community with social, economic, financial literacy, and infrastructure improvements, public health, and mental health needs.

Property values are rising and there is significant new construction in the county resulting in an increase in the 2021 tax digest of 3.92%. Sales Tax revenues for 2021 increased by 14%. The increase in property values, as well as strong retail sales, indicate the continued strength of the economy.

The spirit of comeback is resonating throughout the entire county. Optimism to keep moving forward during our darkest hours has been easier said than done.

Our fight with COVID-19 has been devastating. The uprising in social unrest, racial disparity, and homelessness during a perplexing political climate across the entire nation has exhausted our mental capacity.

There seems to be no rest for the weary with market disruptions from the Ukraine crisis anticipated to add more cost pressures which is causing a four-decade inflation rate.

Douglas County we've come this far by faith, and we've chosen to take a path requiring mind over matter. We are continuing to work while we wait for the storm to blow over. Mediocrity will never disrupt our pursuit of excellence and I'm pouring out my heart to thank each of you for restoring, rebuilding, and revitalizing the place we call home at a time such as this.

Our principles are aligned with my favorite football coach of all time, Vince Lombardi. "Winning means you're willing to go longer, work harder, and give more than anyone

else.” Together we may not be remembered for what we’ve said but the history books will capture what we’ve done.

Our first ever gateway signage and landscaping initiatives are making a bold statement by confirming Douglas County is open for business!

We’ve advanced our marketing efforts with nearly 25 LCD screens in various baggage claim locations in Hartsfield -Jackson Atlanta International Airport enticing visitors to explore outside the lines and visit Douglas County.

Most recently, South Douglas 166 Scenic Byway was among 14 other sites officially certified as charming and exclusive hotspots in Georgia.

Thank you, Douglas County voters, for moving Douglas County from ordinary to extraordinary by approving the 2016 SPLOST which ultimately yields funding for over 84 major projects in the areas of Transportation Infrastructure, Fire/EMS, and Parks and Recreation and the pennies are paying off.

Douglas County is a melting pot of diversity and together we are making a difference. We have great things happening within Douglas County Government, Douglas County School System, WellStar Douglas Hospital, Douglasville/Douglas County Water and Sewer Authority, Douglas County Community Services Board, and Cobb & Douglas Public Health. Our accomplishments are significant, and some of the highlights include:

18,000 square feet Senior Center opened in Lithia Springs in the Fall of 2021

30,000 square feet Multipurpose Center opened at Boundary Waters in the Fall of 2021

Bill Arp and Fair Play Parks renovations completed in the Fall of 2021

Renovation of Fire Station # 4 located in Fair Play planned for the summer of this year.

Renovation of Senior Services located on Fairburn Road is underway this year.

Groundbreaking for the first-ever State Drivers Services Center is underway this year.

30-year Comprehensive Transportation Plan completed for the County this year.

GDOT 92 Highway Construction project is completed, and ribbon-cutting is planned for June of this year.

Veteran’s Village Housing for Veterans opened this year under Douglas County Community Services Board’s guidance and direction.

Lee Road Widening Project kicked off and is underway this year.

Douglas WellStar Hospital opened a brand-new Pediatric Emergency Center in the Fall of 2021.

Douglas County School System delivered a state-of-the-art sports complex with a 5,000-seating capacity at Douglas County High School in 2021.

Alexander High School has a \$8 million Performing Arts Center coming soon.

Lithia Springs High School's old campus will be demolished and a new campus to be built on the same site in the very near future and to top things off, Douglas County School System is currently building a 6,000-seat graduation and multipurpose arena coming soon.

Cobb & Douglas Public Health provided exhaustive support to Douglas County citizens by providing COVID-19 vaccinations, booster shots, and COVID-19 testing to combat the Omicron Variant.

Douglasville/Douglas County Water and Sewer Authority completed the Capps Ferry Sewer Expansion in 2021 and recently awarded 2022 Water and Treatment Plant of the Year for the State.

Within the last year, we've run some big plays, but we cannot afford to lose any yardage. Going forward our comeback must remain competitive as we recover from a pandemic that has caused pandemonium for the entire world.

This past year, a first-ever strategic plan was developed. Douglas Forward 2025 -the five-year strategic plan is our playbook for planning our community's future together. Our comeback requires complete commitment as we separate our emotions from our responsibility to promote unity as we define our vision, craft our values, determine desired outcomes, declare explicit accountability, and establish key performance indicators.

Our strategic efforts are focused on culture, purpose, operating model, and execution. Our six goals include Public Safety, Infrastructure, Economic Development, Public Health, Recreational Facilities & Programs, and Transformation of Douglas County.

Public safety is a major component of the five-year strategic plan, and the Board of Commissioners is committed to funding our public safety agencies to assure competitive pay, high-level training, equipment, and resources in order to sustain timely, quality protective services to the citizens of Douglas County.

We will pursue every possible measure to maximize community safety and Sheriff Tim Pounds stands firm on his words, "nonsense and criminal activity will not be tolerated in Douglas County period."

In our pursuit of public safety, we will continue to invest in sophisticated Fire & Emergency Response, E- 911, and Emergency Management training, equipment, technology, and resources to leverage preparedness, response, and disaster recovery opportunities and Fire Chief Jolivette stand firm on providing impeccable customer service to all Douglas County citizens.

Infrastructure is vital as we build back better in our community. My administration is fully engaged with the bi-partisan infrastructure law and Douglas County is joining the movement to rebuild America's roads, bridges, and rails and expand access to clean

drinking water, yield access to high-speed internet, revamp environmental justice and invest in underserved communities.

Our technology infrastructure is extremely important, and we are investing over a million dollars this year in upgrades and sophisticated equipment to ensure we stay connected with the world as we keep our county functioning.

We must continue our efforts of improving and modernizing connectivity by increasing sidewalks, walking trails, biking trails, and widening roads to alleviate traffic congestion. Many of our subdivisions are in dire need of resurfacing and my administration has a vision and plan to address the need.

We will continue to develop and expand the multi-modal network by increasing the number of routes and connectivity to urban hubs and advancing dial-a-ride access for our rural areas is under consideration.

We cannot take our sights off the environment. I am asking every citizen, every trash hauler, every business owner, and every visitor to join me in leading the fight to eradicate littering and improve recycling as we strive to Keep Douglas County Beautiful.

Douglas County is a place where economic development is thriving. Nonetheless, we must continue to galvanize workforce development and develop homegrown talent and build a strong workforce.

We must continue to leverage partnerships and collaboration and competition to remain relevant and we must integrate evidence-based interventions in the areas of wealth building and financial coaching into existing county and community programs that are designed to promote economic self-sufficiency.

Douglas County is a place where citizens can attain good health and well-being. On the Health Index, Douglas County is the 29th Healthiest County out of 159 counties in Georgia and our goal is to become number one.

My administration will continue to fight to gain herd immunity by encouraging citizens to consider taking the COVID-19 vaccines and booster shots.

We will continue our efforts to identify barriers to access health services for residents and veterans in need and align county and community resources to address underlying factors.

We will keep leading the charge to integrate the delivery of behavioral health, substance abuse, mental health, and developmental disabilities for those in need through the wrap-around services model currently available to citizens at Douglas County Community Services Board.

By year-end, I will release a comprehensive, coordinated evidence-based healthy living report tailored to reach, inform, educate, and motivate Douglas County citizens to increase health-promoting behavior across all segments of our community.

Brighter days are ahead, and our Recreational Facilities and programs are precious commodities. My call to action is to improve access and expand cultural and recreational services.

Today, I call upon the Board of Commissioners to join me in securing a much-needed Comprehensive Plan for our Parks and Recreation Services.

This comprehensive plan will address deficiencies, guide efficient decision making and provide a broad perspective on what resources are needed to advance parks and recreation services within the County.

Together we must create innovative ways to engage our youth because they are our future. I have charged my Executive task force with benchmarking best practices to determine the best approach for establishing programs to support the needs of our youth, particularly those at risk.

Our work is endless, as we go forward. We will continue to improve the county's competitiveness as an employer to recruit, hire and retain a diverse highly qualified workforce.

Thank you, Board, of Commissioners, for casting a unanimous vote to increase the employee minimum pay rate to \$15.00 per hour.

Board of Commissioners you stood with me and provided a 10% pay increase to Public Safety employees and a 5% pay increase to non-public safety employees in 2022 which is a major morale booster for our employees. Please join me in applauding my fellow Board of Commissioners.

This past year we've accomplished quite a bit and there are many more deliverables to complete.

In closing, we must continue to elevate public participation and engagement to ensure all facets of the community are represented.

It is our time, our pivotal moment to convert challenges into opportunity.

Because I know our comeback will set us up for undefined possibilities.

Despite the hard times we've faced, I am optimistic brighter days are ahead.

There is nothing beyond our capacity to come back stronger than ever.

Our future has forged unforeseen trials and tribulations and Douglas County has given resilience a whole new meaning.

The best is yet to come as we press forward in a unified manner to dissolve the injustices and inequities we face. And with everything that we've been through during the last two years, political discord has no place.

Our tolerance level has been strengthened by the obstacles we've faced, and hereafter we will continue to do whatever it takes to propel our county forward.

And my report today is as follows: the State of Douglas County is Good!

I will leave you with the words of Vince Lombardi, "The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have. It's not whether we get knocked down. It's whether we get back up."

Our comeback is steady! Our comeback is strong!

May God Bless Douglas County, the State of Georgia, and these United States States of America.