

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

It is my pleasure to present the State of the City Address for 2019.

The City of Gainesville's Mission is to "enrich the community of Gainesville by practicing good stewardship of resources and providing innovative and excellent services for all people."

The City Council has six values that help us accomplish our mission.

Today I would like to share the ways that the city has demonstrated these values over the past year, and how we will continue to do so in the future.

The City of Gainesville maintains an attitude of "Do more with less – efficiency first".

Since the 2010 census, our city population has grown from 35,000 people to over 42,000 people, a 20% increase. The value of taxable property in the city limits was \$5.2 billion, up 35% since 2010. Our city government operating budget has not increased at the same rate. We have done more with less. The City of Gainesville has a long-standing commitment to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money, while providing excellent – and efficient – city services.

That brings us to our second value, to "Be excellent in our service quality, low expenditures, and effectiveness."

The new Riverside Water Quality Building is the perfect example of cutting-edge technology that brings a better product to the community. This treatment plant – \$12.5-million-dollar investment – is able to make cleaner water than ever before, at no additional cost to users. In 2018, almost 7 billion gallons of drinking water was treated to furnish almost 50,000 water customers. I am proud of our Department of Water Resources for setting the standard for water quality across the state of Georgia.

With nearly 40,000 takeoffs and landings each year, you'll find quality service every day at the Lee Gilmer Memorial Airport. The city is making improvements to the runways, and the terminals are to be renovated to accommodate even more business customers.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

Our public safety departments continue to receive top honors for the service they provide to our citizens. The Gainesville Fire Department boasts a Class 1 ISO rating, which saves money for property owners on their insurance bills.

The city has purchased new technology, equipment and vehicles to make sure that our first responders have the tools they need to save lives. Though the city continues to grow, the Gainesville Fire Department continues to respond quickly to emergencies. Firefighters and paramedics respond to 70% of calls within 5 minutes. Less than one-fifth of the nation's fire departments meet that benchmark.

Traffic is one of the things that slows down our fire trucks, so we ask motorists to be aware of your surroundings and make way when you hear sirens coming.

Traffic is also a focus of the Gainesville Police Department. There were over 2,800 motor vehicle crashes in Gainesville in 2018, which is less than the previous year. Officers are stationed at the locations and times that most crashes occur. In 2018, the police department conducted 38 concentrated patrol efforts to reduce distracted driving, which continues to be the top cause of traffic accidents.

The department also tracks crime statistics and places officers strategically to reduce crime trends. In light of recent events, the City Manager and Police Chief are accelerating initiatives for the Park Hill area that were initially planned for Fiscal Year 2021. In the short term, we are providing a larger presence in the Park Hill area to demonstrate to these “visitors” to our community, who seem to be a part of the recent problems, that they are not welcome in Gainesville and their actions will not be tolerated.

These enforcement efforts, combined with over 200 positive community outreach activities, reduce overall crime. With our new police chief, Jay Parrish, at the helm, I am confident that he will continue to work diligently to ensure the safety of our citizens.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

Chief Carol Martin is not the only longtime director to retire this past year. Gainesville Parks & Recreation Department Director Melvin Cooper announced his retirement after 47 years. He will be with us until May, as we are actively looking for a replacement to fill those big shoes. The city has a nationally known parks and recreation department. Locally, the department is known for good customer service, quality programming, and beautiful facilities. Last year there were 37 special events in parks, 60,000 fitness visits to Frances Meadows and a \$13-million economic impact on the community. The parks department is currently planning for the future and needs public input. If you have not filled out a survey yet, please visit our website at gainesville.org.

One very important parks initiative brings us to our third city value. "Continue to revitalize the Midtown area to further the close-knit community feel".

The Highlands to Islands Trail is a greenway that will begin at Lake Lanier in Longwood Park, continue down Wilshire Trails and Rock Creek Greenway, through the Historic Downtown Square and Roosevelt Square, across the pedestrian bridge at Jesse Jewell Parkway to the Midtown Greenway, beside the Airport to Chicopee Woods, and through a tunnel under Atlanta Highway to the University of North Georgia. The majority of this greenway already exists. We are going out to bid this month with a project that will make one of the final connections needed to create 14 complete miles for walking, running, and cycling.

The pedestrian bridge is critical to connect Historic Downtown to Midtown. We want to continue the close-knit community feel of the square into the rest of downtown, which includes Midtown, the Brenau District, Green Street, and our historic neighborhoods. By purchasing the property on the Midtown side of the pedestrian bridge, the city took control over the future of this important corner, as we did when we purchased the former jail site and demolished that eyesore in Midtown. There is strong interest in both of these properties. We commit to you that we will hold out for the highest quality development on these properties, because we know they are so important to the revitalization of Midtown and to the entire City.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

With the newly renovated Roosevelt Square, events have helped the community share our expanded vision of downtown. Through Main Street Gainesville's events and promotions, the city has brought thousands of visitors downtown. The Gainesville Convention and Visitors Bureau continues to promote downtown, along with Lake Lanier, as Gainesville's main attractions.

Green Street is another downtown attraction that is highlighted each year by Christmas on Green Street. There's nothing like a parade and Christmas carols to make you feel like you're part of a close-knit community. We always have historic preservation as a top priority. Also FYI, the Post Office Building on Green Street is officially for sale and will be relocating in the near future.

The City of Gainesville understands that downtown is the heart of the city, and the economic health of downtown radiates throughout the community.

That leads to our fourth city value: "Be innovative in our economic development, in order to stimulate the local economy".

The Tax Allocation District for downtown and midtown redevelopment is an important tool in our economic development toolbox, and we have added another one for the west side of town. The TAD provides an incentive for people to invest in properties that might otherwise be too expensive to develop. As a result, there are brand new commercial buildings like the JOMCO Construction and Chastain Janitorial Supply. Carroll Daniel Construction continues work on its corporate headquarters on Main Street, and their 150 employees will eat and shop at our downtown businesses. And in the spring, Knight Real Estate expects to break ground on Parkside on the Square, which will add a new type of housing downtown and more restaurants. None of these projects would be viable without the city's help. The city is wise to invest in projects like these that boost the entire city economy.

There's no doubt that Gainesville's economy is booming. Once again, Gainesville was ranked number 3 among America's Best-Performing Small Metropolitan Areas by the Miliken Institute. That means Gainesville has one of the best economies in the United States, based on job creation, wage gains, and technology growth.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

Lanier Technical College has expanded to meet the growing needs of the work force. Classes began at the new campus on Hwy. 365 in January. The City of Gainesville's investments in that corridor began over a decade ago. Those investments in water and sewer service will be returned by the talented workers produced at Lanier Tech.

At the city of Gainesville, we're not just planning for tomorrow. We are looking years into the future. As our existing industrial parks fill up, a new one is needed. The largest business park in Northeast Georgia will be constructed on 1,300 acres of city property surrounding the Allen Creek Soccer Complex. This massive property has highway connections to Interstate 985 and 85. The development of this property will provide access to a beautiful nature trail along the creek for the public to enjoy.

Our partnership with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce has attracted new private investments of \$108 million in 2018, including Fox Factory, Vital Foods, German company ZF, Canadian company KIK, and a new Georgia Chair Factory event facility. That's 920 new jobs.

Healthcare is an economic driver in Gainesville, which is home to 9,400 health care jobs with a payroll of \$557 million. With the growth of Northeast Georgia Medical Center's Graduate Medical Education program, those numbers will continue upward.

And of course we can't mention industry in Gainesville without talking about chicken. The poultry processing industry has brought billions of dollars to Gainesville and currently employs over 8,500 people. This year the city showed its support for the poultry industry by creating a new scholarship for poultry science students. The Gainesville Spring Chicken Scholarship is funded by sponsorships of the annual Spring Chicken Festival, which is coming up on April 27 at Longwood Park. Last year the chicken festival was honored as one of the Top 20 Events by the Southeast Tourism Society.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

The fifth city value is "Be accountable to citizens and each other for our actions".

That means we do what we say we are going to do. SPLOST is a great example of the city following through with its commitments. The voters approved \$25 million in projects for public safety, transportation, and recreation. All of those projects are either complete or in progress. We are most excited about the designs of Fire Station #2 and the Youth Sports Complex that are under way right now.

The city continues to study traffic congestion in our City. There are 3 major projects on the drawing board to help with the congestion we all deal with each day. They are the Dawsonville Highway Corridor and McEver Road intersection, the Green Street improvements including two roundabouts that the State is evaluating, and the intersection at Jesse Jewell and John Morrow Parkway. These projects are all on State Highways, and the City and The Georgia Department of Transportation are working together. These projects are moving forward as we speak.

That brings us to our last but certainly not least important city value, we "uphold the highest professional and ethical standards" at the City of Gainesville.

We meet the standards to be named a City of Ethics by the Georgia Municipal Association.

The Finance Department continues to win awards for its excellence in financial reporting and budget presentation, and received a clean audit again this year. City taxpayers can rest assured that every penny is accounted for and every dollar well spent.

State of the City Address 2019 – Mayor Danny Dunagan

The City of Gainesville is committed to being an innovative city, providing a close-knit community feel in which to live, work, learn and play. Your government will continue to provide excellent service in a cost effective, efficient manner according to these organizational values.

The City Council along with the entire City staff is looking forward to another productive and promising year for our City. We as a Council are committed to the safety of our citizens. As we work on the present and plan for the future, we will maintain the quality of life that we all are accustomed to.

I, on behalf of your City Council, want to thank the citizens of Gainesville for your support, participation and feedback. I also thank this Council for their dedication to the well-being of this City and its citizens. This Council is thankful for all the City Employees, led by City Manager Bryan Lackey and Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard, for their dedication to the citizens and to this great city we all call home. We are off to another busy year and looking forward to see what 2019 brings.