

State of the City Address - March 12, 2018

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here tonight as I very humbly share with you the state of our great city of Fitzgerald, GA. Abraham Lincoln said that whenever he got ready to speak to people, he spent about two-thirds of the time thinking about what the people wanted to hear and one-third thinking about what he wanted to say. That's what I've tried to do here tonight. So let me share with you what I will do and what I will not do in tonight's address. First, I will not share with you a bunch of regurgitated statistics nor detailed (and boring) financial statements. In my opinion, that's not what tonight is about. Those statistics and numbers are a matter of public record. Anyone can look them up anytime they feel the need. What I will do tonight is share with you all of the positive things I have discovered in my first few months as your Mayor. I will share with you how and by whom this city is being run. And I will share with you my vision of where are going. Many of you either know me or are getting to know me pretty well. One of the things you have probably already learned about me is that I don't do things a certain way simply because it's always been done that way. In fact, that's a huge reason I ran for this office. People are always making the excuse that "well, that's just the way it's always been here." If things aren't working, I have no problem trying new things.

There's no way to do this without mentioning a few names. I've always been told to stay away from mentioning names in speeches because you invariably will leave someone out. Let me begin by saying that all 122 employees at the City of Fitzgerald are important to me. I plan to meet every single one of them and have already started that process. During the Mayoral election process, I had many people offer me advice. Surprise! Can you believe that? One of the many things I

heard was that I need to get rid of the two administrator form of running the city. “Why do we need two city administrators?” And on the outside looking in, it definitely may seem strange to some. But let me just tell you, it works. Kathy Young and Cam Jordan are Fitzgerald’s two deputy administrators. Respectively, they each oversee approximately half of the city’s departments. They, along with City Clerk Cristina Evans, have been absolutely invaluable to me since Day 1.

I’ve found that many of you have a misconception about the Mayor’s role in Fitzgerald. I do not run the day-to-day operations of the City. I leave that to Cam and Kathy. We three meet on a weekly basis to go over all of their departments on an individual basis. We are also in contact with each other daily to make any other decisions that must be made. They know what issues they need to contact me with and what issues they should handle themselves. I’ve always been told that a great leader hires good people under him and then gets out of the way and allows them to do their job. Cam Jordan and Kathy Young are “good people” who have both forgotten more about city government than I will ever know. We have a great relationship, and I’m very thankful for them.

I’d like to touch briefly on a few other departments but not all of them. So please no one get your feelings hurt tonight if I don’t mention your name. Every single one of you are doing a great job. I just want to highlight a few things.

1. The Grand Theatre is the crown jewel of Fitzgerald’s downtown area. The tile at the entrance of the Grand is now completed and looks amazing! The Marquee outside is half way there with work to resume shortly. Concession area is to be constructed soon. Outside colors are being worked on by a local appointed committee. The Grand’s ticket booth is going to be enlarged and

plans are being presented for restroom restoration. Many more improvements are being proposed. Palm trees will be planted in front of the theatre, as well. Brandy Elrod continues to select movies choices at the Grand, and attendance is good. Support for Grand improvements seem to be favorable from the public.

2. The Depot project is nearing completion. If you haven't gone by to visit, please do so. We've moved the tourism office there, and everything looks amazing. Go by and let Brandy and her staff share with you all that's going on. It's going to be a truly special place.
3. As one of only nine communities in Georgia to be chosen for the new RURAL downtown tax credit, we expect the jobs, acquisition, and rehabilitation tax credits to enhance our ability to further implement the Downtown element of our Five Year Work Program under the Tourism Plan. We anticipate some announcements in the near future.
4. David Walker and his staff do a great job with our Public Works department. Our new alley machine is quickly making a difference in our overgrown alleys. We have reached an agreement with Suncoast Bedding to increase the efficiency of our leaf and limb collection. Our new street sweeper is improving the look of our streets. And we will soon have a litter vacuum aiding the effort. Demolition of blighted property continues even as day-to-day responsibilities are maintained.
5. Chief Smallwood and the Fitzgerald Police Department AND Chief Jeffrey Dobbins and the Fitzgerald Fire Department are finally fully staffed again! I've actually had the chance to meet with the fine men and women from both of these departments. I expressed to them my sincere gratitude and support for what they do each day. Please always keep all of our first responders in your prayers.

6. We have started our Mural Project! The mural at the corner of Central and Sherman is well underway. It's the first of many murals we have planned to help beautify our city.
7. We are in the early stages of developing a "Keep Fitzgerald Clean" Commission. Please listen out in the near future for more details. There are things we can't always fix right away, but there is no excuse for not cleaning up our city. I want people to be in awe of Fitzgerald when they visit. I want businesses and residences and parks to be neat and clean. Together, we WILL make this happen.
8. I also can't miss the opportunity to thank Chessie Sherrod and Jessica Stone for the work they do each day at our animal shelter. Taking care of unwanted animals all day long each day may often seem like a thankless job. Kathy and I recently visited the shelter, and just know that these two ladies are two of the hardest workers you will ever find. Their love and dedication for those animals is nothing short of admirable.
9. From the airport to the DLS to the landfill to our city attorneys to all the wonderful ladies who work right here at City Hall each day, the city of Fitzgerald is in good hands! I do not say that lightly.

Also, I can't speak to the many good things going on in Fitzgerald without mentioning a few more people. Jason Dunn is the Director of the Fitzgerald Ben Hill County Development Authority. His extreme passion and commitment to bettering Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County is definitely contagious. Let me just share a few of the projects in the works. When I asked Jason for some positive points to share in this address tonight, his reply began with "Where do we start?" That's a good sign, folks.

1. We are just before breaking ground on the Hwy 319 Business Park which will strengthen our inventory of shovel ready industrial property. This project is being funded with SPLOST dollars directed towards the development authority and a \$500,000 One Georgia grant.
2. Recent infrastructure improvements made by the development authority have also paved the way for MANA Nutrition to construct a 50,000 SF distribution warehouse. This improvement not only made our industrial park more appealing to MANA, but it will also make the park more business friendly to future users.
3. Golden Boy Foods announced in December that they would be investing approximately \$9 million in capital improvements in their Fitzgerald facilities. This was a competitive project that could have gone to other locations, but a collaborative effort between city, county, development authority, and Fitzgerald Utilities landed it here.
4. We just completed a transaction that transferred ownership of the Perry House Rd Delphi site to Modern Dispersions paving the way for it to be put back in use.

I also want to mention a growing and beneficial relationship with Dr. Shawn Haralson, Fitzgerald's School Superintendent, and the entire Fitzgerald Ben Hill County School System. We look forward to working closely with our schools and doing whatever we can to support the education of Fitzgerald's youth. They are our future, and we must do our part.

I want to also recognize Steve Taylor, our Ben Hill County Commission Chairman, and thank him for being here tonight. Steve and I have a long-time friendship and a mutual admiration for each other. Steve got into this for the exact same reason I have: To make Fitzgerald

and Ben Hill County a better place to live. Period. Together, he and I have vowed to repair and restore the relationship between Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County. We meet once each week at breakfast for fellowship and to discuss important matters to all of us. At the end of the day, we are all one and should act as such. Steve, thank you for your service and commitment to Fitzgerald and Ben Hill County.

And lastly, I'd like to thank my Council. Thank you for bearing with me as I navigate myself and us through these first few months of my term as your Mayor. I promise to be here for you and for the citizens of Fitzgerald as we lead ourselves into a promising future. Thank you for your service to this great city.

I want to leave you with a very simple quote from John F. Kennedy. He said, "Things do not happen. Things are made to happen."

God bless all of you. God bless Fitzgerald, GA, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.