



DURHAM COUNTY BOCC HIGHLIGHTS 2016-2020

Presented by Chair Wendy Jacobs

November 23, 2020

Tonight we have much to celebrate as we recognize two of our outgoing commissioners and also recognize the four years that this Board of County Commissioners has spent working together on behalf of the people of Durham. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the achievements and accomplishments of this board. Due to the pandemic and malware attack in March, I was unable to present the State of the County Address which is always an important time to educate the community about what is happening in Durham County Government.

I am proud of the work this Board has accomplished together over the past four years. We have been remarkably aligned in agreement on almost everything we have done. We have shared the same focus and passion for wanting to address poverty in our community, invest in our children and families, the root causes of gun violence, mental health and substance use, strong support for public education and creating good paying jobs at diverse skill levels for all people in our community.

Over the past four years, this Board has implemented transformative policies to address issues and invest in evidenced based, systemic and integrated approaches. We have funded priorities implemented by Durham County staff to support change that addresses historic and deep rooted racial and economic disparities and inequities.

We could not have been successful in any of our efforts without the outstanding work of Durham County staff. The county manager, clerk to our board, county attorney, chief of staff, general managers, department heads and more than

1900 county employees make all of this a reality by implementing the policies and priorities of our board and translating them into programs and services that improve the lives of people in our Beloved Durham Community.

The last nine months of have been especially challenging for our staff due to the impact of COVID 19 and the malware attack last March. We have seen each and every staff member and department step up, adapt, innovate, pivot, be flexible and creative. Yet always putting safety and best practices first and still able to meet the needs of our residents at a time when the vital human services the county directly provides makes a difference in our residents' urgent needs for food, housing, utilities and access to education and health care.

Over the past four years our Board has made significant investments in Goal Area 1 of our Strategic Plan, Community Empowerment and Enrichment. We have prioritized funding for our groundbreaking and transformative Durham Pre-K Program. We have invested more than \$10 million in this program which provides access to high quality pre k education for 4 years old in Durham so they can begin kindergarten on an equitable footing, ready to learn and succeed. We are addressing racial and economic disparities, bringing up the salaries of our Durham Pre-K teachers to the level of Durham Public Schools and investing in local early childhood programs which are often minority and women owned businesses.

Our Board has supported a strong early childhood system by fully funding evidenced based programs such as Reach out and Read and Wash and Learn that are promoting literacy, Resilience and strong parent child bonding.

By requesting and funding the creation of new county positions- an ACEs and Resilience Coordinator, Early Childhood Coordinator and Racial Equity Officer, our Board is promoting system and community wide approaches to racial equity, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience and being Trauma informed. This Board is also leading the way in North Carolina by launching the first county level Early Childhood Action Plan underway as we speak.

Over the past four years, we have seen positive progress and improvement in our relationship with the Board of Education so we can best support the public education needs of our children, families, teachers, and schools. I am proud of the strong collaboration and cooperation I have led as Chair of our Board that

has resulted in the first ever joint CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) to best meet the backlog of repairs, maintenance and renovation as well as construction of new schools. Our Board has provided significant increases in funding to support the salaries of DPS certified and classified staff as well as innovative programs like the Community Schools model taking root in Durham Public Schools.

In Goal Area 2 Health and Well Being for All, our Board has made strong investments to address issues of racial and economic health disparities. Along with the City, we signed the Paris Accord and committed to the Fast Track Cities To End HIV AIDS by fully funding an HIV Health Navigator to address the high rate of infection and death amongst black males in our community for what is a preventable and treatable disease.

We conducted the first ever Liveability Assessment that has led to our first ever Age Friendly Durham Plan with next steps of implementation that will lead to our accreditation by AARP and the World Health Organization. Our Board has led the way addressing systemic issues around food insecurity with the funding of a new Food Security Officer and a study underway for the feasibility of a Central Kitchen to serve our schools, seniors and families' needs for healthy and affordable food.

In Goal Area 3 of our Strategic Plan, Safe Community, our Board has continued to strongly support innovative programs like Bull City United, Coming Home, Mental Health Court, the Re-Entry Council and many other initiatives to meet the needs of people and keep them out of our Criminal Justice System. We launched Durham Joins Together to Save Lives, the county wide effort to address substance and medication misuse and our Community Paramedicine Program to provide wholistic approaches that impact social determinants of health. We are leading the way in implementing evidenced based practices to reduce the impact of Domestic Violence on individuals, children and families in our community by supporting the expansion of the Family Justice Center model that provides wrap around services in one location, by donating the use of a stand alone county building in Downtown Durham for this purpose.

Our Board has prioritized funding for a new Youth Home that will provide comprehensive services to support youth needs throughout our community and

be a model for sustainable and environmentally friendly building design and operations.

This Board has led many efforts to support Goal 4, Environmental Stewardship and Community Prosperity. We have pushed for use of county assets to help meet urgent needs in our community and promote Shared Prosperity and Health and Well Being for All. This includes the county stepping up to address the affordable housing crisis in our community. We are building more than 300 units of Affordable Housing in Downtown Durham in partnership with a minority and woman owned business. We have adopted an Affordable Housing Surplus Policy with the City to support construction of affordable housing as well as approving Affordable Housing Density Bonus and Expanding Housing Choice Policies.

Our Board has adopted the first Long Term, Low Income Tax Deferral Program to impact gentrification, preserve family wealth and protect the fabric of historic neighborhoods. We have begun the process of assessing the use of another public asset, the former DSS Building, and the best way for this to be used to meet community needs. In addition, our Board has adopted the first Public Art Policy which designates 1% capital funding for public art or history to be incorporated into new construction or renovation projects. We can see the result with the wonderful new whimsical purple sculpture outside of our award winning spectacular Main Library. We pushed for the use of the ground floor of our renovated Admin II Building for affordable retail to support thriving local businesses in downtown. We understand the need for digital equity and requested a current study on broadband access in Northern Durham County as the first step of a plan to address gaps in service for people in our community. I am proud of the strong partnership and collaboration I have led as Chair between our Board and the City Council and resulting innovative and effective joint solutions that such as our groundbreaking Eviction Diversion Program and Homeless Street Outreach Policy and Program.

Our Board led the way adopting a Climate Change Resolution in 2018 and the planning work is underway to help us meet our goals of 80% sustainable energy usage by 2030 and 100% by 2050. We have moved the needle on job creation, economic development and making sure community needs and benefits are centered in decision making. Our Board adopted a new Economic Development Incentives Policy in February that includes a community benefits assessment

focused on our education to jobs pipeline, internships and apprenticeships, MWBE hiring, purchasing and practices and good paying jobs for all backgrounds. I am proud to report that this board has supported record breaking economic development over the past four years, especially in the sectors of advanced manufacturing, tech and life sciences. The Secretary of Commerce recently reported that since 2017 there have been 24 announcements of new or expanded economic development projects resulting in more than 5,000 jobs and \$5 billion of investment in Durham County to support our tax base and fund schools and other vital public services.

In Goal Area 5, Accountable, Efficient and Visionary Government, our Board has been a strong voice for transparency and accountability in how we are using public funds and measuring outcomes. We have seen improvement in our Budget Book with funding now broken down at the program level within departments. Soon we will have a public facing Economic Development website requested by our Board that will highlight public information about our incentive projects and delivery of community benefits. Recognizing the need for equitable language access to Durham County Government, our Board has requested a plan to address these needs which staff will bring forward soon.

These are just some of the highlights of the important policies and initiatives led by this Board of County Commissioners over the past four years. These efforts have laid a strong foundation for work that will need continued and sustained investment over the coming years. I am grateful for the strong voices, dedication, passion and unique perspective of each member of this Board. I am grateful that we have been able to come together in unity and solidarity around virtually each of these initiatives to move them forward and improve the lives of people in our community. With the help of our outstanding staff, we have been able to implement these polices and priorities in innovative, effective, collaborative ways to make best use of collective public resources.

We have many challenges ahead in the face of this pandemic. It has been my honor and privilege to work in partnership with the Mayor of Durham, as we do our best to chart the unknown territory of how to respond to an unprecedented public health crisis. I could not be more proud of the residents of Durham County who have stepped up since the Mayor and I implemented a mask mandate back in mid April and our Board initiated a Cover Durham program that supported one

of the first publicly funded free distribution of face coverings. I could not be more proud of our Recovery and Renewal Task Force and Roundtables leading innovative and responsive approaches informed directly by the needs of our community, contributing to ground breaking programs like Back on the Bull, Greenlight Durham, the Health Ambassador Program, Durham Streeter, and Durham Delivers that are helping keep our restaurants and small businesses alive and our workers and residents safe. I want to acknowledge the stellar actions of our Public Health Director Rod Jenkins and his staff adeptly leading our response to this public health crisis and Derrick Bowens, the Board of Elections and staff for their masterful work during our recent election.

We have a light at the end of the tunnel with the news of vaccines on the way. Nothing could be more important in the weeks and months ahead than to build on the foundation of partnership and collaboration that we have seen across government agencies, nonprofits, institutions and the private sector to address the disparate inequities laid bare by this pandemic. I am grateful for the incredible work of our EOC (Emergency Operations Center) staff, Food Security Team, Homeless Team, and joint initiatives to address digital and high speed internet access. We must build on this acceleration of innovative efforts to meet needs of everyone in our community. We must look to recovery and renewal but not a return to the past as we find ways to connect the 36% of low income workers of color who are now unemployed to good paying jobs and address the affordable housing and eviction crisis that has been exacerbated by this pandemic.

The upstream investments made by this Board of County Commissioners will be an important foundation for the work and future ahead for Durham County. It has been my honor and privilege to serve as Chair of this Board over the past four years. I love this work and the opportunity it provides me to serve the community of Durham I love so deeply. I want to thank each and every one of you for your partnership as fellow county commissioners. Vice Chair Hill and Commissioner Reckhow, I thank you for your service and will miss working with you. Commissioners Howerton and Carter, I look forward to working together with you as we forge a new partnership with our incoming Board members on behalf of our community, working together for the best interests of our residents and Durham County Government.