

# 2014 State of the County Address

March 24, 2014

Michael D. Page, Chairman  
Durham Board of County Commissioners

Good Evening. On behalf of the Board of County Commissioners it is my pleasure to bring to you our Annual “State of the County” Address. We welcome those of you in attendance this evening in our chambers, as well as those who are viewing this message on cable TV and on the web.

I would first like to take a few moments to recognize my fellow county commissioners.

**Vice-Chair Brenda Howerton**, who has served for five years, and has been vice chair of this Board since 2012. We appreciate your care and concern for this community. I wanted share with you that Vice Chair Howerton is running for the office of 2nd Vice President of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. With her election, she will eventually rise to become president of the organization. It will really be an accomplishment to have a Durham elected official leading that statewide organization.

**Commissioner Fred Foster, Jr.**, who is entering his second year. Fred, let me add that I would be remiss if I did not take the time to acknowledge the outstanding work performed last year, ably presiding over this body as our chairman. In addition, let me congratulate you for receiving the “Practitioner” designation from the Local Elected Leaders Academy at the UNC School of Government. We appreciate your leadership and stewardship during your tenure. You moved our County forward at a critical time.

**Commissioner Wendy Jacobs**, who is also in her second year on our Board. Thank you for your energetic work and for your focus on key initiatives. I appreciate how you have taken on key issues in the area of social services and community advocacy. I understand you were quite passionate earlier this month as you highlighted these issues during a meeting with our Washington delegation members.

And, **Commissioner Ellen Reckhow**, now our veteran county commissioner, serving citizens since 1988. Ellen is also a former chair who led our Board in an outstanding manner from 2002-2008. Thank you for your attention to detail and for challenging us to think strategically.

Before I move on, I want to ask your indulgence as we honor our former **Chairman Commissioner Becky Heron** who passed in January. Those of you familiar with our Board know that Becky Heron devoted **29 years** of service as County Commissioner. Indeed, she was the first woman to be selected chairman of this body and led the Board from 1996-1998.

She was a consummate public servant who always listened to constituents all across this community. Becky was known for being determined, energetic and decisive. Her passions included the environment, planning, animal control and the welfare of senior citizens. We will miss her, but her handiwork is evident throughout Durham County.

As you know, this past year has been a year of transitions, and I will tell you that more changes will take place in the next few months.

Last August, **County Manager Mike Ruffin** announced his intentions to retire from Durham County Government. As we know Mike was an outstanding County Manager who led us over 13 years. With his leadership, we continue to be among a small number of the 3,069 counties in the nation to hold a **Triple A Bond Rating**. We gathered in late January to say farewell, and he has now entered the world of retirement. We wish him well.

After an extensive search process, our Board selected **Wendell M. Davis** as our new County Manager. Davis formerly served as our Deputy County Manager from 1999 until 2011, when he resigned for a Vice Chancellor position North Carolina Central University. He returns to Durham County Government on April 14<sup>th</sup> to begin his tenure as our County Manager.

I'd also like to recognize our **Interim County Manager Lee Worsley** for graciously agreeing to lead Durham County Government in this transitional period.

Thank you Lee, for being an experienced and talented professional manager! As a matter of fact, Lee is the current President of the North Carolina City and County Management Association. He also serves as southeast regional Vice President of ICMA, the International City/County Management Association. Without a doubt, we are in good hands with Lee Worsley.

In 2013, Durham County gained new department heads as two retirements created vacancies in critical areas. Following extensive recruitment processes, our County Manager selected **Greg Marrow** as our new Chief Information Officer and **Skip Kirkwood**, as our new Director of Emergency Medical Services. I am delighted to note that both men came aboard in these key leadership roles and hit the ground running.

We value the culture of success that **former County Manager Mike Ruffin** established during his tenure, one that allows and encourages our department heads and staff to be leaders among their peers. As a result, I am delighted to recognize several major honors garnered by Durham County department heads and staff in 2013.

**County Attorney Lowell Siler** was named "County Attorney of the Year" by the North Carolina County Attorneys Association, an affiliate group of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. The award is given to a dynamic county attorney who has shown great leadership and dedication to counties.

**Library Director Tammy Baggett** received the North Carolina Library Association's Roundtable for Ethnic Minority Concerns (REMCo) Roadbuilders' Award for Public

Librarianship.

The Award recognizes ethnic minority librarians in library education, academic, public, school and special libraries, who have served as pioneers in librarianship, and who represent a positive role model in the field.

**Public Health Director Gayle Harris** received the prestigious Ham Stevens Award from the North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors. She was recognized for her leadership within NCAHLD and her 40 years of service to the Durham community as a nurse, community volunteer, civic leader and the county public health director.

**Lynn Richardson**, Durham County Library's North Carolina Collection librarian was inducted into the Historical Society of North Carolina.

**Mark Schell, Interim Emergency Management Director** received the Durham Police Department's community service medal for his work with the Biological and Chemical Emergency response team.

These are but a few of the many awards and honors received in 2013 by our employees and departments. As stated in our Strategic Plan, our local government strives for excellence and to be a role model for other governments. And as you can see, we are succeeding in that area.

(Applause)

### **New Facilities, New Services**

By far, 2013 will be remembered as an historic year in which the entire landscape of Downtown Durham changed, thanks to two ambitious County building projects. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, our new Durham County Courthouse was officially dedicated.

On a brisk Sunday afternoon, elected officials, community leaders, court officials, staff and the public gathered for the official ribbon cutting. Once inside, they heard from NC Supreme Court Chief Justice Sarah Parker and others before taking a tour of the sparkling new building.

This 10 story building has 20 courtrooms with room to expand to 27. And those who experienced the long wait for one of two elevators in the former courthouse will really appreciate the six, large high speed public elevators. Durham County now has a state of the art courthouse that also contains our main Durham County Sheriff's offices.

The \$119 million dollar project also features a parking deck with nearly 900 spaces. In keeping with our high performance building policy, it is built to Gold LEED certified building standards, also incorporates natural light and features a green roof.

Those who honor the history of our community will be impressed by the special art wall of 6,000 images. The mural includes photos of judges, sheriffs, clerks of court, district attorneys, as well as historic elected officials across the city and county.

In November, a long time goal of consolidating our Durham County Human Services was finally accomplished and we conducted a formal dedication of our new Human Services Building on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Member of our Board of Health, Social Services Board, County Commissioners and the North Carolina Veterans Affairs office joined staff, and community members, for a formal ribbon cutting, brief dedication program and tours of the building.

This unique building was actually built in two phases.

You may recall that the Health Department side was constructed, staff relocated and the former health department was demolished to make room for the other half of the building.

In 2012, the Durham County Department of Public Health, Durham County Veteran Services and Alliance Behavioral Healthcare moved into the new space. The remaining portion of the \$90 million dollar Human Services Building was built to connect with the first section. Social Services moved from its two separate locations into their completed space in October. This 300,000 square-foot building was also built using sustainability principles expressed in our high performance building policy.

Certainly these two transformative buildings will engender civic pride for years to come.

## **Economic Development**

Our Board continued to work with local businesses, the City of Durham, the Durham Chamber of Commerce and others in economic development efforts to continue to grow our local economy and to create jobs for our residents. Like the rest of the country, Durham County continued to steadily recover from the economic downturn by seeking projects that would ultimately positively benefit the community.

Early in 2013, the board considered an economic development incentive request from **bioMerieux** for a \$48 million dollar project at its US Headquarters in Treyburn. This company employs 7,000 workers worldwide with 637 full time employees in North Carolina. Because bioMerieux is an important partner with our community's biotechnology sector, we felt it was important to support this diagnostic healthcare company. We agreed to provide four hundred thousand dollars to retain current jobs, and to gain 44 new jobs through their expansion.

**Syngenta Biotechnology** requested and received up to \$375,000 in economic development investment funds to support its \$94 million dollar expansion that would also yield between 100-200 full time jobs. Part of the incentive will be used to train Durham residents for jobs at the company.

Our Board also approved up to \$1 million in economic development incentives to encourage **Purdue Pharma Manufacturing** to build a 120,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Treyburn. Purdue plans to invest \$59 million in the plant and to create 100 new jobs. This company produces pain medications.

GE Aviation received \$200 thousand dollars in an economic development contract to support a \$29 million dollar expansion at its Durham facility. In addition the company will hire 50 new fulltime workers. The expansion will increase the capacity of the Durham facility to assemble new fuel efficient, lower emissions engines which is an economic and environmental benefit. We are happy to partner with GE Aviation which has facilities in three other North Carolina counties: Ashe, Buncombe, and New Hanover.

Durham County assisted **AW North Carolina** with its sixth expansion in fall 2013. The company's automatic transmission manufacturing operation announced a new investment of \$129 million dollars which will create 56 new jobs. Since its 1998 establishment in this community, AW has invested some \$612 million dollars and currently employs 1600 fulltime workers. Durham County will provide \$900,000 in incentives to assist this expansion.

For years, we heard that Durham has been in need of downtown hotel rooms. Our Board also approved a community development grant for Concord Hospitality Enterprises Company in the amount of \$400,000 to preserve the historic McPherson Hospital façade that will be incorporated into its Marriott Residence Inn Hotel at 1108 West Main.

This is the third hotel project that we have supported in an effort to increase the number of hotel rooms in the downtown area, and to help attract more visitors and conferences. 21C Museum Hotel is a \$48 million dollar project now underway in the former CCB/SunTrust Building, also supported by a grant from our Board.

### **Human Services Collaboratives**

Public Health and Social Services are some of the core of the services that counties provide. 2013 was an unparalleled year the Public Health Department as it celebrated its Centennial Year. Think about it, 100 years of public health services for this community. Congratulations!

(Applause)

And in another first, the Health Department received its first State Accreditation from the NC Public Health Accreditation Board in June of 2013. And on top of that, the department met 148 out of 148 accreditation activities. A perfect score was earned! Thank you Gayle Harris and your staff for putting in the countless hours that led us to gain this recognition.

**Good Health for all** is a vital concern of our Durham County Board of Commissioners. We know that too many of our residents remain unserved or underserved in the health care continuum. That's why we partnered with the Lincoln Community HealthCare foundation by providing a donation of \$50,000 from our County Community Health Trust Fund. This donation will help purchase services, products and equipment to help this historic facility that has been a major institution in helping Durham residents become healthy.

Durham County Social Services successfully dealt with some **expected** and a few **unexpected** challenges in the year. One major challenge involved moving 500 employees and major services from two locations into one.

The agency that provides the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens, also worked **around** and **through** two significant situations that had its origins with the state and federal government.

The State began implementation of the new NC FAST program which was touted as providing a more efficient way to manage the food stamp program, now called SNAP...Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. For months before the implementation, local DSS departments, including ours began to publicize the change in the application and recertification processes to clients. The goal of which was to make sure that no families missed their benefits.

Unfortunately, the state's software problems began creating backlogs in cases. Applications were not moving through the system, creating frustration all along the line. While an unfortunate blame game between the state and local agencies was going on, families without food stamp benefits were struggling to survive.

Fortunately, our Department led by **Michael Becketts** worked overtime to troubleshoot the applications that were backlogged to make sure Durham residents were able to access the food to which they were entitled. They continued to reach out to keep families from falling through the net, even in the face of the troubled implementation of NC FAST.

In October, the agency found itself on the wrong end of the Washington budget battle that resulted in a federal government shutdown. Michael Becketts was told by the state that child care subsidies could end. Indeed, the Work First program which provides transportation and job training took a hit. In home care for the elderly and disabled and Meals on Wheels were caught in the struggle. As a lengthy shutdown loomed, Becketts met with childcare providers to explain the impact of a suspension of child care for about 2,200 children.

The Social Services Board and Mr. Becketts even came before our Board of Commissioners to seek \$235 thousand dollars to help fill the gap and to cover one month of some services, such as food for meals on wheels, but not child care subsidies.

Thankfully, the shutdown was settled before the end of the month. Another unexpected gift came in the form of a \$25 thousand dollar check from Dr. Victor Dzau, President and CEO of Duke University Health Systems to help support the food and nutrition services emergency fund. We thank Dr. Dzau and the Duke family for their support. In Durham, partnerships are everything!

(Applause)

### **Strategic Plan Update**

You may be aware that we are heading into our third year of Durham County's Strategic Plan. Our Board adopted this plan with broad community input on key goals and priorities for Durham County. This living document has been put into action with County leaders working diligently on initiatives to make positive impact across our five goals: community prosperity, health, safe community, environmental stewardship and accountable government.

Our initiatives are tied directly to these goals as we strive to be, as stated in our vision: “a thriving, vibrant, diverse community with abundant opportunity for all residents to live, work, learn, play and grow.” In the upcoming year, our teams will continue to make strides in key areas that impact our quality of life.

### **Community and Family Prosperity**

For our goal of Community and Family Prosperity and Enrichment, we have focused much of our effort around economic development. The City-County YouthWork Internship Program put area youth to work in local government offices and area businesses last summer and is gearing up for another successful year. With input from the business sector and other partners, the City and County are teaming to create a joint economic development strategy. In the upcoming year, our community prosperity goal will focus on bolstering how the County helps residents find and maintain jobs. Additionally, we’ll focus on strategies the County uses to fight homelessness. But holistically addressing the growing issue **poverty** is a key action step within this goal area, and I will speak to that in more detail shortly.

### **Health**

Durham County continues to take many steps to promote and support health and well-being for all. The “Play Streets” initiative has been a neighborhood-focused collaboration with the City of Durham to close the streets and have events aimed at promoting exercise and healthy living. Our “Veggie Van” initiative is distributing fresh produce on Fridays at the Human Services Building, thereby improving food access in our urban core. In the upcoming year, our health team will focus efforts on increasing the number of insured individuals, fighting substance abuse and mental health problems, and tackling the obesity epidemic.

While not initiated by us, there is another health improvement initiative that Durham County is promoting and that I am personally participating in. “A Healthier Durham Challenge” I don’t know about you, but I have committed myself to improving my personal health this year.

This is an online tool that really helps us track our progress when it comes to the number of pounds we shed, glucose levels, blood pressure, and of course the time and duration of the exercise we participate in.

We live in this great community, so much to celebrate. Too many of us are not living our healthiest existence. That’s why we have to get serious about our health and wellness as a community. And why we need to participate in the “A Healthier Durham Challenge.” It’s easy to join. And it helps us achieve community wide health goals.

Just go to [www.ahealthierdurham.com](http://www.ahealthierdurham.com) and register, and you are on your way to a better health!

I’m ready to shape up and I hope you will join me.

## **Safe Community**

As we strive to support and sustain a Safe and Secure Community, we've employed several varying initiatives, like the bystander "hands only" CPR initiative that has trained about 4,000 Durham County residents through a City-County partnership that focused efforts on Durham Public Schools students. Meanwhile, the County placed defibrillators throughout our own buildings as a way to be ready should a visitor or an employee suffer cardiac arrest.

By investing in equipment and building community capacity for CPR, we hope lives will be saved. In the upcoming year, our Safe and Secure Community goal will focus efforts on expanding specialty courts targeting special populations.

## **Environment**

In order to improve the environment, we all have to be stewards. That's why the new Charge Ahead Durham initiative is so important. You can go to [www.ChargeAheadDurham.org](http://www.ChargeAheadDurham.org) to sign up: each week you will be emailed a set of "charges" of various things you can do to protect the environment and save money. Participants are entered to win exciting prizes, and this is a fun way we can all pitch in to improve our beautiful community. An additional environmental focus is our "Trees Across Durham" campaign, which is planting more than 500 new trees at elementary schools, parks and throughout our community.

Meanwhile, our recycling roll-cart pilot project has distributed 95-gallon roll carts to about 2,000 residents in unincorporated Durham County. So far we have seen an increase in the number of households that are recycling as well as the amount of materials being recycled. Finally, we are close to completing a groundbreaking watershed restoration project in partnership with Duke University.

The watershed restoration of upper Sandy Creek will capture and treat the stormwater runoff from Duke's main campus, improving water quality and the health of the entire watershed.

## **Accountable, Efficient and Visionary Government**

Our strategic goal of being an Accountable, Efficient and Visionary Government encompasses many strategies to improve transparency, streamline our processes and build our internal capacity. Some highlights from the past year include our first group of County employees attending an internal Leadership Academy as well as training on our County values of Accountability, Commitment, Exceptional Customer Service, Integrity, and Teamwork & Collaboration.

Giving back is an expectation of an accountable government, and many of our employees have participated in a City-County Habitat for Humanity home rehab project. That home was dedicated this past weekend. In the upcoming year, we will focus efforts on targeted process improvements aimed at improving how we do business and how we serve our customers.

Durham County is using technology in new ways to improve transparency. Our Durham County Sheriff's office focused on stepping up its use of technology. An online crime



mapping tool was implemented to help protect the public and to increase access to the office. Many are familiar with the RAIDS online program which maps crime in the community. The implementation of ATARAIDS in the crime mapping toolbox provides greater information sharing among law enforcement agencies and helps our deputies in the field.

The Sheriff provides a Project Lifesaver program to families who might have a loved one suffering from a cognitive disorder who are at risk of wandering. With the use of a small personal transmitter placed on the wrist or ankle, an individualized tracking signal is emitted, helping public safety agencies locate and rescue those persons.

Programs such as the CHOICES program developed by our Sheriff's Office, teaches young people strategies to help them avoid an interaction with law enforcement. Creating Healthy Opportunities Inspiring Children to Have Everyday Success program is specifically for youth aged 11-16. With the assistance of Family Academic Mentoring Empowerment or FAME, counselors provide positive parenting strategies training and family mentoring. The goal is to give youth essential skills necessary to support positive choices.

In addition, as the County works to enhance its interaction with citizens, we have now started hosting interactive "Live Twitter Chats", where participants can follow us on Twitter and ask questions in real time and receive answers.

Our first such session featured the Sheriff's Public Information Officer Paul Sherwin responding to law enforcement questions from the public in real time. Other topics set for a "Live Twitter Chat" include health topics, perhaps a conversation with our new County Manager, our County budget process and more.

## **Tackling Poverty**

I want now to focus on a major issue in our community, the prevalence of poverty.

Some 50 years ago, President Johnson declared a war on poverty. That declaration was followed by social programs designed to help lift families out of conditions that led to a life of poverty and hardship. We have seen improvements in the incidences of poverty over the generations. Others can debate whether we have come far enough.

I say yes, progress has occurred, but more work is required if we are to eliminate poverty.

For years, it has seemed as if Durham is reflective of Charles Dickens' familiar writing....A Tale of Two Cities. I recall the familiar line in his classic tale..."It was the best of times; it was the worst of times."

Yes, Durham epitomizes that idea of two distinct realities in the same community. We have booming areas of broad prosperity; we're known on national lists of accolades that highlight the best in education, food, attractions and economic development. **The best of times.**

Conversely, we have areas that have been plagued by poverty for generations, despite our best

efforts so far. There are too many areas and communities that are home to embedded poverty, blight, economic disenfranchisement, crime and an unbreakable sense of hopelessness. **The worst of times.**

As you know, Mayor Bill Bell announced a new initiative to work neighborhood by neighborhood to address and eliminate the conditions that keep some of our residents bound in poverty. Durham County is pleased to join with the Mayor in his **“Reduce Poverty in our City, Neighborhood-by-Neighborhood, and Year-by-Year starting in 2014.”** Be assured that we are at the table working together. I joined the Mayor as he held an initial meeting last week with members of that committee, and I am encouraged by the conversation. We are already organizing and I look forward to seeing our community make impactful strides.

Just a month ago, President Obama announced a new presidential initiative called, **“My Brother’s Keeper”**, which is focused on helping young men of color who continue to struggle. He noted that this is a time of crisis for black and brown males. They disproportionately face high unemployment; they drop out at greater rates than any other demographic. And unfortunately too often connect with the criminal justice system. His program will call on businesses and foundation leaders to use their best thinking and resources to help students succeed educationally and to help them avoid interactions with the criminal justice system. I look forward to seeing the results of that work in communities across our nation.

I announce today “A Call to Action” by Durham County Government to host an upcoming “Summit” to bring our best ideas to the table to help our young men of color. We, too, are seeking new ideas to help promote prosperity and opportunity for all, and of course new strategies to attack the barriers that prevent economic self-sufficiency... Low educational attainment, poverty and economic vulnerability, unemployment, lack of job skills. We need to connect these young people with a clear path to move out of poverty and into the middle class.

We are already working to bring the business community to the conversation to help provide opportunities for training, internships and more to help our young people graduate from school and become trained for the jobs of the future.

Durham has many, nonprofit agencies, many here this evening who have toiled for years to help alleviate poverty and the conditions that allow it to continue. We must to build bridges out of poverty in order to move the needle on this negative condition that impacts too many of our residents.

In order to fully gain momentum as we tackle high poverty in Durham, we must also engage our higher education community. I am also reaching out to Dr. Bill Ingram at Durham Technical Community College, Chancellor Dr. Debra Saunders White of North Carolina Central University and Duke University’s President Dr. Richard Brodhead. Together they will greatly increase our capacity to seek and develop successful, research based strategies to tip the scales in our community’s favor.

If we can steer young men out of poverty and get them gainfully employed and self-sufficient,

think of the positive impact on children and families. We can really make a lasting difference in Durham if we keep a laser-like focus on lifting men, women and families out of poverty.

We can more vigorously engage our business community to provide internships, summer jobs and training. We can look at our fraternities, sororities and community groups to mentor, help build support networks and intervene with our youth in a way that has not been done before.

We can challenge our faith community to provide more coordinated support to struggling families, even “adopt” families to help them succeed for more than just a season.

We can look to our judicial system to help provide support and alternatives to a life in and out of the corrections system.

We can make sure we are linking with Durham Public Schools to reach those who are most vulnerable and connect them with partners who can help keep them on track to success. The best way to provide services in these challenging times is to look for every opportunity to collaborate.

At the end of the day, I am convinced our answers are here in Durham and that they don’t rest with a federal government program. We have the will and capacity to make the change we seek.

I invite men and women of goodwill who are currently engaged in this work to join me for the **Summit, on a date to be announced very soon**, to meet and talk through proactive practices and measurable steps that we will take to improve the lives of others. I am looking for business leaders, single parents, educators, faith leaders, the medical community, young people, and persons who are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and work on this important issue.

Our challenge will be to find successful programs across the country that are “moving the needle” on poverty, and begin to replicate anything that makes sense for our community. Together, we will make a difference.

I’m looking for a total engagement across the Durham community to sit together at the table, share successes and finally to put forward new and more coordinated, comprehensive strategies to knock down poverty in this great county.

Together, we will make a difference in the lives of others. We must help our brothers and sisters become self-sufficient and able to earn salaries that will allow them to successfully raise healthy and happy families.

Thank you for your continued support of Durham County Government. We will continue to support our residents and provide the best quality of life for all in support of our theme: **Live. Thrive. Grow. Thank you!**