



## **State of the City Address**

Good Evening,

Every year, I look forward to this opportunity to share with you the state of our city. As with most communities, we have our challenges and our opportunities. I am proud to say our blessings are greater than most of our sister cities and the challenges we face are more than surmountable with dedication of your City Council and the diligence of our City employees. I would be remiss in not acknowledging Susan Bailey's service to the City over the last four years and also welcoming Jimmy Lovern to the City Council. Incidentally, we held two City Council planning retreats last month and the level of enthusiasm and dedication that existed throughout these retreats was gratifying and exciting. Your City government truly takes their role in our future very seriously. Together we are dedicated to moving our city forward as a team with a unified vision for the future of Hapeville. The cliché saying – “there is no I in team” could never be truer than it is with your elected officials. We truly operate as a team and work in harmony to deliver results.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have operated under the Council Manager form of government for the last year and have completed 2 years of operations under this “new” form/structure of government. While the transformation to this “form” has not been without challenges, as we all

learn our roles in this operation, it has functioned as a more stable and practical method of operating our city. Our service delivery from leaf collection to providing a drive up window for utility and tax payments is all directed to meeting your needs as citizens of Hapeville. Our employees, under Bill Werner's leadership, have accepted the challenge of providing first class customer service and are continually striving to improve. I can share that City Council is totally supportive of our form of government and you will continue to see actions that improve our City. I would like to acknowledge Bill's work, our team of department directors, and all City employees in all they do in providing timely, efficient, and effective services. The role of local government is to deliver a product. That product consists of Police and Fire services, Street and Sanitation services, Recreation services, Water & Sewer services, Economic Development operations, Administrative Staff services, efficient revenue billing and collection services along with the administrative "back bone" to support these operations. Without the dedication and enthusiasm of every city worker, we would never be able to provide these services as efficiently as we do. Our services are our product and our staff does an EXCELLENT job in delivering our product!

One of the indicators of the effectiveness of government is the ability to set aside money for the inevitable rainy days that all too often beset all of us in these troubled economic times. With Ford closing, we can remember the painful decisions that we faced as a community. I am pleased to report that we have recovered and are stable. We are able to fill positions as they become vacant and we have a full complement of Fire personnel and we are actively recruiting for Police officers to fill vacancies. As we see cuts in

services in cities around us, including taking police officers and fire fighters off of the streets through furloughs, I can assure you that we do not face financial troubles. Our current fund balance is in excess of 3.5 Million dollars which allows us to maintain our level and quality of services with no anticipated tax increases. As we all know, our 16 mil tax rate is very high but after making significant cuts to the budget after the closing of Ford, it was the desire of many of our citizens that spoke during that time to maintain the high level of services that we enjoy. While we continue to monitor our current expenditures very carefully, we must begin anticipating the realignment of future tax digests from Fulton County. It is our belief that Fulton County will have no choice but to make fair assessments of property values caused by the devaluation in the real estate market. Along the lines of financial stability, we continue to monitor the health of our retirement portfolio. As you may remember, we recently transitioned from a GMA plan to the current Mass Mutual plan. This greatly enhanced the financial soundness of our retirement system. As with all changes, this too came with a few bumps in the road but we are confident that Mass Mutual will continue to deliver us a very sound and viable retirement vehicle. In recent discussions with our pension fund managers, we discovered that as bond rates go up in the future, we will soon reach a point whereby we will invest enough retirement funds in bonds to take care of the current “legacy costs” of our pool of retirees. This is great financial news for it locks in the soundness of our long term obligations while making our current contributions more predictable.

We are also in the process of defining a financial policy and guideline plan that will create trigger points for reserve levels. We will establish the

threshold that we must reach in our reserves, capital improvement funds and long term debt funds before a tax roll-back can occur. This type of policy has not been in place in Hapeville in our recent history and it will greatly assist us in defining our future financial destiny.

As you can see, we have carefully planned for the financial health of the city. While we are not immune to the current economic bleakness, we are optimistic about our future. The Jacoby project at the Ford Plant continues to move forward although a bit more slowly than we had hoped. Jacoby continues to court potential tenants for this development and I am optimistic that when the credit market thaws, we will see rapid redevelopment in this area.

The Hapeville Association of Tourism and Trade (HATT) continues to be a financial success story for Hapeville. With the funds generated through our Hotel/Motel taxes, we are able to fund projects related to Tourism and Trade within the city. These funds will allow us to relocate the Christ Church, renovate the Depot Museum and we currently hold the matching funds necessary to move forward on these and other projects.

## DEPARTMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS

### FIRE

Our Police and Fire operations are the shining stars of Hapeville services. While not undermining in any way our other departments, the services provided by Police and Fire are mission critical and one of the fundamental services that we provide. 2009 brought us our first ISO review

of fire operations in over 20 years. The ISO agency rates the effectiveness of our manpower, equipment, infrastructure, communications and other departmental operations. Their findings are scored and the rating achieved is reviewed by insurance carriers that underwrite insurance coverage for our homes and businesses. The score generated from this review is a major factor in the rates that we pay for insurance. The lower the score the better! I am happy to report that we achieved a score of 4 which is excellent and places us on the list of superior departments in the Metro-Atlanta area. While not official, we are in the process of making some improvements recommended by ISO and have a chance of possibly reducing our score to a 3!! Again, this is not guaranteed at the moment but it is a possibility. I am very proud of our firefighters and the work that they do! They are highly visible in the community and give of their time in many ways. They are a well trained group of employees who deliver life saving services to the citizens of Hapeville. We expect to continue seeing great things happen in this department under the capable leadership of Tommy Morris.

## POLICE

Policing in any city is a difficult challenge. Hapeville's location creates some unique challenges especially for a city of our size. With our proximity to Hartsfield Jackson International Airport, 2 major interstates and one of the worst crime zones in the City of Atlanta, it is paramount that we have a strong and aggressive police presence. Under the leadership of Rick Glavosek, we continue to shine as a department and are constantly making Hapeville a more viable option for the recruitment of new officers. In the past, the pay for a starting officer in Hapeville was not necessarily attractive

in the market place. This led to some high turnover as officers would seek “greener pastures”. Rick proposed some incentives and Council supported a more competitive salary for starting officers. This will insure that we continue to attract quality law enforcement officers for current and future vacancies.

While we are not immune to crime, what we do have is fantastic response time and our officers work very hard to solve the crimes that do occur. These men and women really do take their job home with them and feel a sense of ownership when it comes to keeping Hapeville safe. During difficult economic times we will often see increases in burglaries within Hapeville. This has been true in the recent past as we have seen a small but disturbing increase in residential burglaries. I will break tradition a bit and ask Chief Glavosek to bring us an update on some recent developments in these cases:

Rick.....

Another exciting development in the Police Department is the recent approval that we received for State Certification. While we were once State Certified, this certification was not renewed due to some issues with mandated record keeping and ongoing training programs. When Rick came in as Chief in 2007 one of his goals was to recapture the certification. I am happy to announce that in December of 2009, he achieved that goal! Next stop – International Accreditation!!!!

I am very proud of our Police Officers and Fire Fighters! These men and women literally put their lives on the line to protect us and that takes a special breed of human being. I will gladly put our departments up against any other Public Safety operation in the State of Georgia! Thanks so much to all of you for the protection that you provide our citizens and visitors!!

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

Another group of core services provided to Hapeville is delivered by Lee Sudduth and the great workers in our Community Services operation. Lee has created a well oiled machine delivering a variety of services that we all depend on! From Parks and Grounds, Sanitation Services, leaf collection (our favorite topic), Street Maintenance and Building Permits, our Community Services operation has a huge responsibility! We recently deployed a street sweeper and this has assisted us in keeping our streets and storm water drains free and clear of debris. I am aware that there is some frustration with leaf collection during last fall and I can assure you that Lee listens! Being a “tree city”, the volume of leaves generated certainly seems to prove that it’s a true designation indeed. Lee’s staff picked up 140 tons along 68 curb miles of streets of leaves during this past season! This is indeed a daunting task! Because of the efficiency of our Community Services operation, we are delivering sanitation services at nearly a break-even rate. This is a tremendous improvement over past years in which our sanitation services “lost” several hundred thousand dollars each year.



Lee and his staff also maintain our city facilities and they are quite hands-on in the approach. A recent example of that are the renovations performed at our central cashiering area at city hall. Virtually all of that work was performed “in house” and this saved us taxpayers thousands of dollars! The same is true in the recent renovation of the Cofield Park Scout Hut. I hope that you have had the opportunity to visit that facility. It’s a gem of a building and receives regular use by civic clubs and outside users.

Along with everything else, our Community Services workers make sure that we have clean drinking water, sufficient sewage infrastructure, clean city gateways, a monitored recycling program and safe roads. Add to that list the assistance that they provide our Police and Fire operations in times of emergency and you can quickly see that Community Services certainly accomplishes a great deal with a small head-count!

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/SPECIAL EVENTS/MAIN STREET

Part of having a great quality of life in Hapeville revolves around the building of community. Cities that have no special events or sense of community really have no personality. With the vision of Allie O’Brien, our Main Street Board has been a tremendous asset to the city. The Main Street board is a very vibrant and active board working hard to promote local businesses as well as the City of Hapeville as a whole. Allie works hand in hand with the Hapeville Association of Tourism and Trade to help promote our city through our festivals, movie nights, Downtown Live events and other special events. Allie also serves as a critical interface along with City

Manager Bill Werner when businesses or individuals seek economic development opportunities within Hapeville.

Two very successful events (other than our festivals) have been the Downtown Live events and Movie Nights. Both events encourage our citizens and visitors to embrace an evening of affordable entertainment. I hear countless compliments from residents and former residents about how great these events are! I can specifically remember how pleased I was last year when I observed 200 or 300 people (not good with head counts) all walking around with big smiles on their faces as they enjoyed the music and de-facto class reunion at a Downtown Live event. These events help preserve the rich culture and history that Hapeville has! Keep your eyes open for an expanded calendar of events this year!

Another beautiful addition to our city was the recently completed Aviation Mural on the Fulton Theatre building. This has received some great press and will be enjoyed by residents and visitors for years to come!

## IT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ashley Smith is in charge of a 1.5 person IT department! When Ashley came on board, the City of Hapeville was on the “information dirt-road”. In a short period of time, Ashley has nearly single-handedly brought us well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the implementation of a city wide server system, a modernized VOIP telecommunications system and the deployment of the first phase of the city-wide wi-fi system, Ashley has been extremely busy!

Ashley is also bi-lingual; he speaks English and computer, the later of which most of us don't understand!

There are so many behind the scenes issues that Ashley and his assistant deal with, I find them difficult to list. I can share with you that Ashley has delivered the much anticipated newly designed website, has fully implemented the In-Code system (court portion online soon), has trained most if not all staff members on software operation, tweaked the phase 1 Wi-Fi system, deployed several surveillance cameras, redesigned our network system, maintained ALL computers and servers, implemented a data disaster recovery plan, etc..... I could list more but frankly none of us would understand because they are so technically deep! Ashley and his assistant remain invaluable assets to the operation of the City of Hapeville!

## RECREATION

Tod Nichol's mission statement as defined in his goals and objectives about says it all -"To become a world-class community center by providing those who live in, work in and visit Hapeville the opportunity to participate in a municipality of leisure experience in both group and individual settings." Our recreation department continues to serve our residents well by offering a variety of activities geared to all age groups. Our recreation staff has also expanded their reach by becoming an integral part of our festivals and special events. The sock-hop event last year was a resounding

success and they have plans to expand upon that this year. Our youth sports continue to see increased participation and the staff has done a great job in reaching out to the youth of our community. Creating a safe and nurturing environment for our youth, is very important in their development. Studies have shown that youth who participate in sporting and recreational activities are much less likely to “get into trouble” and Todd and his staff have done a wonderful job in offering many options for our youth!

Recreation is not all about youth and our department recognizes that! The programs offered by the recreation department touch all age groups. I anticipate that council will support the purchase of a more accessible bus in the near future. Many of our seniors have difficulty entering and exiting our smaller vans and we are looking into options for this purchase as we speak.

The recreation staff has also managed your tax dollars well by assuring that the fees charged come close to covering the direct costs of delivery. While I don’t expect any department to “make a profit”, it is important that non-residents pay their fair share for access to our taxpayer supported programs. Rest assured, we do receive a “big bang for our buck” in our recreation department!

## CITY CLERK/HUMAN RESOURCES

Our City Clerk, Alice Shepard, recently assumed the role of Human Resources Manager. Her primary role in this job has been to streamline our Human Resources operations. In the past, different departments within the

city operated under different sets of guidelines when it came to personnel. Council saw the importance of this operation and implemented policies of uniformity in the Human Resources arena. Alice has worked hard to centralize personnel files, update the employee handbook, communicate with the employees regarding benefits, communicate with the retirees regarding benefits and communicate through both of her roles to Mayor and Council. She also assisted in the creation of a safety committee and works with our insurance companies in an effort to control benefit costs.

In her role as City Clerk, she attends many meetings and along with Jennifer Elkins, makes sure that all minutes are taken, transcribed and made available via our website. Jennifer worked to achieve a grant for the historical preservation of documents and we are in the process of acting upon that now. Alice and Jennifer also work hand in hand with our boards to assure that training opportunities are made available and that our boards are properly staffed. Our City Clerks office works very closely with our Alcohol Review Board especially during application and renewal time.

This is another department that has tremendous responsibility yet operates with minimal staff!

## PLANNING/ZONING

Yet another one person operation in the City is our Planning and Zoning Manager, Chris Montesinos. Chris is instrumental in providing feedback and staff recommendations to our boards and also spends a great

deal of time researching and writing a myriad of ordinances and processes. Chris also works with staff on LCI projects, grant writing/proposals and is an integral part of our consolidated review process designed to streamline the development review process.

A major talent that Chris brings to the table is his experience with our CAD mapping software. With Chris's skill-set in this arena, we are able to keep our zoning and other cad maps current and up to date.

Chris also continues to monitor and provide technical support for a variety of ongoing projects within the city. While development has slowed, Chris remains busy modernizing our zoning districts, working with our attorney on a modernized sign ordinance and working with other staff on implementation of upcoming TE and LCI projects.

## FINANCE ADMINISTRATION

With all of the activities that I have mentioned tonight, a key missing ingredient is the money to pay for the staff to deliver the services that we provide. That's where our Finance Department under Mike Clark comes in! The monitoring and procurement of our revenue sources is critical to our survival. Our Finance Department is responsible for all aspects of billing, collections, purchasing and the constant monitoring of the city's financial position. One big gain that we have seen in this department is a more aggressive collections policy. By implementing policies and procedures and the benefits of our new software system, we are more able to capture delinquent revenues more efficiently.

The central cashiering process seems to be successful. Although I was unable to receive a chicken biscuit at the window yesterday, many residents appreciate this added service. I appreciate the dedication that Mike's staff shows to our citizens. They in many ways are the face of Hapeville that many citizens see and they enjoy interacting with the citizens.

I am also happy to report that Mayor and Council have received more timely and concise financial reports. Governmental accounting is very complicated and Council appreciates the "boiled down version" of our financials. After we receive the summary of our current audit, I am anticipating holding a Town-Hall meeting where we will present an in-depth review of our recent audit as well as an update on our current financial health.

Our Finance Department will continue to monitor the trends from the Tax Assessors Office in Fulton County. Mike and his staff are in constant contact with Bert Manning regarding properties on appeal and any signs of what future tax digests may look like. They are also constantly working on updates of the fixed assets of the city. This has become a very important aspect of government accounting since the GASB legislation was passed.

As for the future, the Finance Department is working towards GFOA guidelines prior to the implementation of the next budget.