

Mayor Michael Caldwell's 2023 State of the City Address (Friday, January 20, 2023)



# STATE OF THE CITY 2023

## Welcome

I am so excited to welcome you all to the Woodstock Arts Theatre here in downtown Woodstock for my second State of the City address.

We are joined today by some special guests, and I'm honored to have them here. Please help me in welcoming them this morning. I told you last year that I thought we had the best City Manager in America. I'll spoil it for you: I had only been on the job about three weeks at that point. With a year under my belt, I've got to tell you, this guy is the real deal. We are beyond fortunate to have him, and so much of Woodstock's success can be attributed to Jeff Moon's presence here in our city. Join me in welcoming him this morning. City Manager Moon.

During my days in the legislature, we used to laugh about being "part-time legislators" given the amount of time we were spending on the job. To the legislators in the room, I raise you a mayorship. In all seriousness, on November 15th, Katie and I sat down to map out our December schedules. Between the two of us, we had six free nights available in December, as of November 15th. I share this not to complain. I genuinely believe this is the greatest job on the planet. But each of you know that, with a young family and a business, a schedule like that only works for one reason, and I was going to ask you to help me thank her this morning, but with two of our three kids sick, she is home. She is the only reason I get to be here this morning with you, and she doesn't just put up with the events and the meetings, she's constantly helping me find ways that we can serve this city better as individuals and as a family. She has dedicated herself to bringing a stronger arts presence to our community. She is raising three incredible children. We have the very best First Lady any city could ask for and I know she's watching this live now, so I'm going to ask you to help me thank my bride Katie for all she does for Woodstock.

Members of the City Council, City Manager Moon, city staff, honored guests, my fellow Woodstockers, my duty this morning is to report to you on the state of our city. That is, not to

report on the state of our government, but on the condition of our community. On the state of our Woodstock.



Last year, you welcomed me to this stage as a newly minted mayor. The 31st Mayor of this great city, taking on this new responsibility during our 125th year of cityhood. One hundred and twenty five years of Woodstock. This month marks the dawn of a new quarter-century in our city's story, and I mean for us to meet it head on. We will not pass on this day's challenges to future councils or future generations. We will continue to heed our calling and leave this city better for our children. This morning, we are going to discuss the ways our city has met big challenges, how we have even bigger opportunities ahead, and the ways that we will together move our city forward as an undisputed leader in our nation.

As we dig deeper this morning, I'll be providing updates from several of our departments, highlighting and celebrating the service of some outstanding public servants, and charting a course forward into the new year. As we do so, I'd ask you to pay special attention to my three major policy priorities for the upcoming year:

1. We are going to enhance the quality of life in our city by focusing on parks expansions and establishing Woodstock as a regional trail hub.
2. We will build a more sustainable, secure economy in our city by diversifying our commercial base with a concerted effort to recruit high-paying jobs and businesses into the core of our city.
3. We will concentrate our efforts as a city on building generational wealth for our citizens through the largest economic engine in human history, American home ownership.

Parks and trails. New jobs. Home Ownership.

We will cover many topics this morning, and our city has so much to celebrate, but these three endeavors will be central to my administration this year, and today we'll explore why.



The 21st century has presented a period of unprecedented change. Our city continues to rise to the opportunities presented to us in this new millennium, and we have seen remarkable growth and prosperity as a result. Although our community hasn't answered every moment perfectly, I frequently remind others that my hope and my goal is simply to be right more often than we are wrong. In the year that you have trusted me as your Mayor, we have seen plenty of decision points. I am under no illusions that I have gotten every call right, but I am confident and very proud to say that Woodstock is stronger today than it was one year ago.

From crime rates to the unemployment rate, from transportation projects to relationships with governments and the private sector, our city's metrics are rapidly improving and continue toward record success.

Our story is that of a city unexpected. We've built one of the most visited, attractive downtown destinations in the southeastern United States. The lives and livelihoods of a Woodstock family are better in nearly every way than ever before.

**The state of our city is stronger than ever, and our best days are still ahead.**



Last year, we discussed a brief history of our city. I told you the story of Sir Walter Scott, and his popular novel *Woodstock*. I told you the story of a sleepy settlement in the north Georgia woods that named their soon-to-be-city after the book. We walked through the story of a forgotten-railroad-stop transforming into a city with 4500 residents by 1990. That population doubling to more than 10,000 ten years later, to 26,000 in 2010, and again to 35,065 in 2020. I know it comes as a surprise, but we continue to grow. The most recent estimates place our population somewhere north of 37,000. Our businesses continue to grow. We'll dive into some of the details around these numbers, and how we're rising to meet the challenges that come with growth shortly, but I want to start out with you today by remembering together the lesson we shared last year:

Growth comes with challenges. Some of them are extremely complex. These are difficult challenges and strains.

But the challenges that we face are issues that nearly every other community in America would do anything to have. As cities and communities around the state and the nation struggle, watching their populations flee to greener pastures. As soon-to-be-empty-nesters in cities not-so-far-away watch their children dream of the days that they can leave their dying towns behind.



As once vibrant cities breathe their final breaths, Woodstock looks ahead to brighter days. We stand a welcoming beacon for those who yearn for a sense of community. For those who are looking to live, work and raise a family in a community underpinned with a sense of belonging. And in doing so, we are building a strong, sustainable future for our city and its next generation. The majority of us, myself included, came from somewhere else. We're building this city - this community - together. Yes, we could try to close the door behind us. We could channel our energy into solving problems like traffic and parking by ensuring no one new ever had the opportunity to call Woodstock home.

But our calling is not to shepherd our home to an orderly death. Our calling is to breathe life into this place. To build a thriving city that welcomes those who share our sense of community, our shared values, and our vision for the future.

Dying towns don't have issues with congestion. They also don't have a future. For as long as you'll have me, I choose a strong, vibrant future for Woodstock. As we strive to ensure that even a changing Woodstock remains our authentic Woodstock, we must be sure it remains a safe city.



# Public Safety

## Police

The paramount duty of our government is to build and support a safe city. Woodstock must be a place that residents and visitors alike can travel our streets, sidewalks and trails without worry. I, like so many of you, choose to live in a place where my son and daughters can run a few feet ahead of me without that shadow of panic entering the back of my mind. Over the last several years, not every city has managed to achieve this objective.

The Atlanta Regional Commission's most recent Metro Atlanta Speaks survey tells us that for the first time ever, crime is seen as the region's biggest problem, ranking nearly 3 times as many votes as the next biggest issue. Our neighbors throughout the region do not feel as safe in their cities as they did just a few years ago, but here in Woodstock, as is so often the case, we have a different story.

Despite our city's growth from a population of 23,000 in 2010 to more than 35,000 in 2020, I reported to you last year that our crime rate actually declined by nearly 45%. Catch that: our population exploded, and we saw our crime cut in half. In the time since 2020, we've continued to see this trend. From 2019 through 2022, our crime rate has reduced by 29% and year over year from 2021 to 2022, we saw a 12.5% reduction. No matter how you cut it, our trend is clear. Woodstock is not the place you want to come to commit a crime.

Safewise.com ranked our city the 12th safest city in Georgia and the 4th safest city in our state with a population of more than 30,000. With more than 500 cities in our state, that is no small feat. Our city is a reliable, safe destination to live, work, and play and it is getting safer thanks to the outstanding work of Woodstock's finest. Would you please join me in thanking the incredible men and women of the Woodstock Police Department for placing themselves in harm's way each and every day to keep our families safe?

These days, it is more trying than ever to be a police officer. Police departments face more scrutiny than ever before, and our nation faces a critical shortage of both existing officers and

new candidates entering the field. We have 57 sworn officers here in Woodstock. As we made our way into 2022, our vacancies rose to an unprecedented 15 empty officer slots. I can assure you that, unaddressed, that condition would impact the long term state of public safety in our city. I am so proud of this Council for responding decisively by investing in unrivaled ways in our officers. Since my swearing in as your Mayor one year ago, our Council has invested in historic ways in our police officers, raising starting police pay here in Woodstock by a record setting 26% in just one year. We are still a few officers shy of full force, but we are well on our way, and if you've ever dreamed of a career change I know a chief who would love to meet you. This increase met a critical market challenge while also ensuring we invest back in those who have invested their professional lives in keeping us safe. I want to thank our Council for showing leadership on this important issue, and our Command Staff for their leadership in this endeavor. Speaking of command staff, during last year's State of the City address, you helped me celebrate the decorated tenure of our past Chief of Police Calvin Moss. After ten years here in Woodstock, Chief Moss chose to retire and we began the search for his successor. I am proud to report that, despite the big shoes left behind, we found a truly impressive leader to fill them. Chief Robert Jones joined us from the Kingsland Police Department with a storied career serving as the Chief of Police for multiple municipalities here in Georgia, a gubernatorially appointed warden, and with both the United States Army National Guard and in combat missions around the world as a United States Marine. This man has proven himself to be a servant-leader throughout his career and during his first year here with the City of Woodstock, and I would ask that you all help me thank him for his service to our city. Chief Jones, please take one more stand.

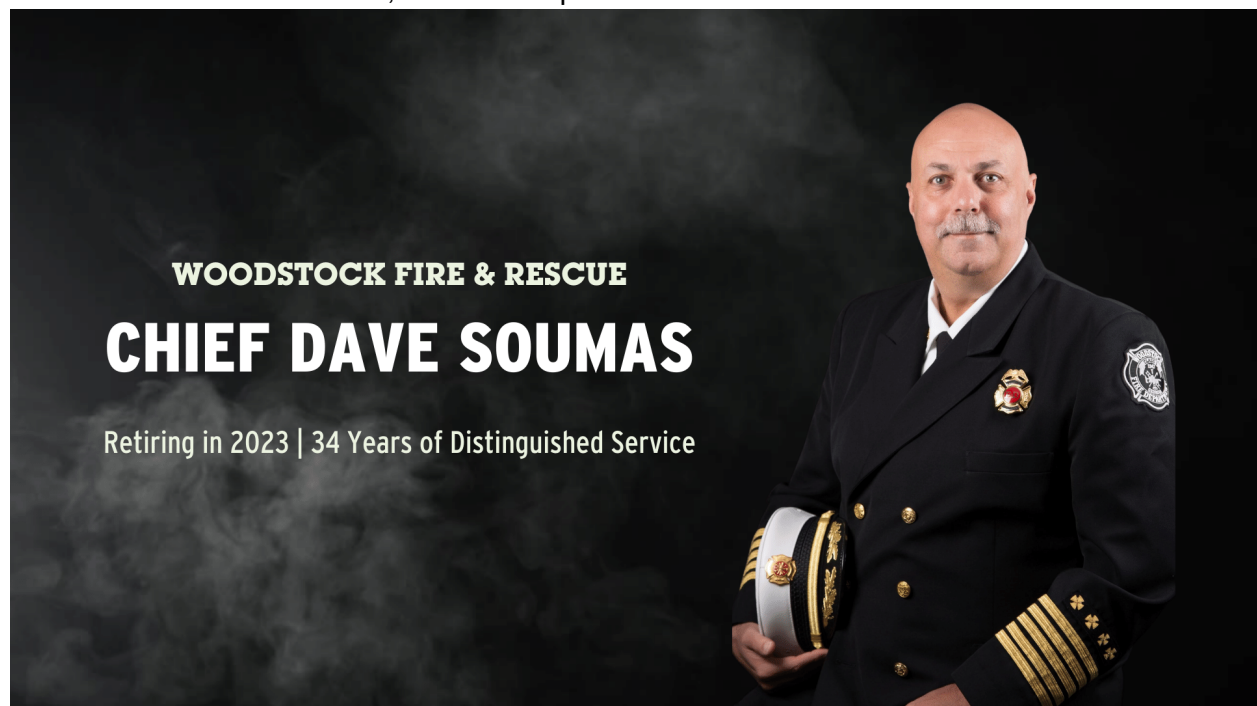


## Fire

Woodstock's finest were not the only ones busy working to keep our community safe last year. Woodstock's bravest, the members of our award-winning fire department, found themselves answering a record-setting 6,846 calls for service and 2,387 new construction inspections. The department continues to meet the needs of our flourishing community with the same unparalleled spirit of service that our citizens have come to know and love. When I tell you that our fire department has an Insurance Services Office - or an ISO Rating of 1, that may not mean

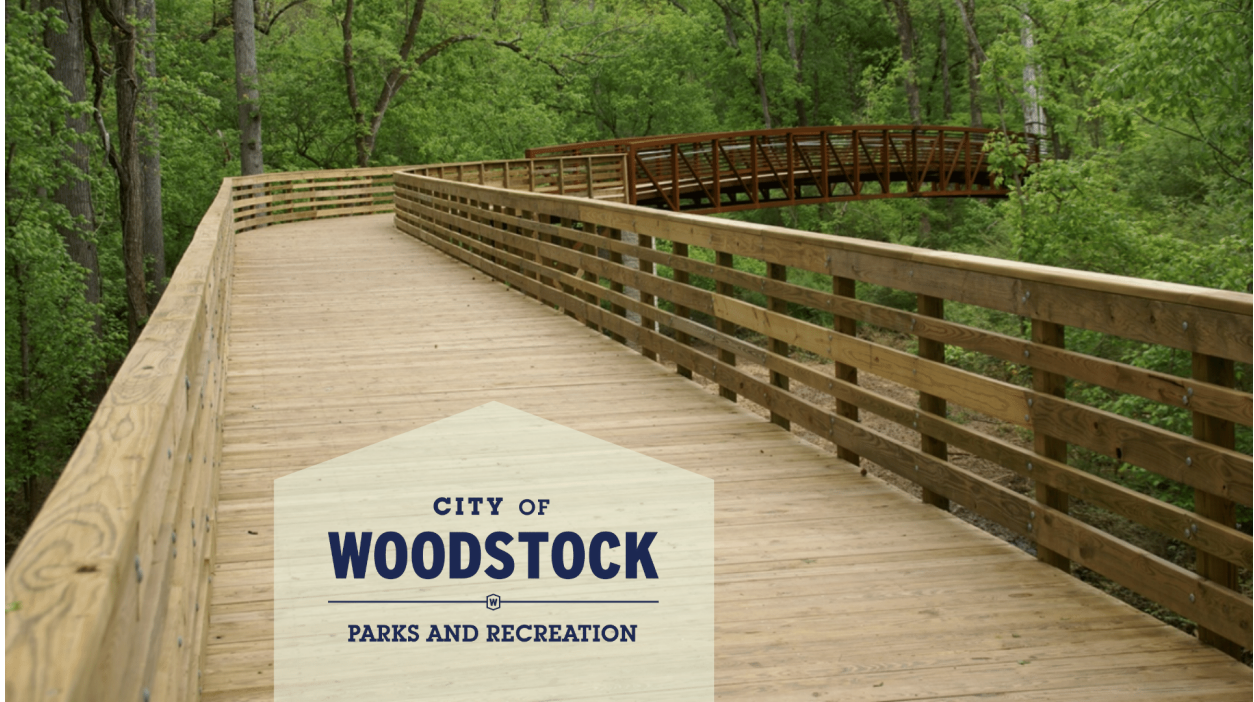
much to you. An ISO rating, also known as a fire score, is a measure from 1 to 10 on how well your community is protected from the threat of fire by your department. One is the highest score. There are only 456 Departments in America with a 1 rating. Out of 27,182 departments in America, the Woodstock Fire Department is rated in the top 1.6% of departments nationwide. When speaking of the safe community that Woodstock enjoys, the security we feel in our livelihoods and property is a direct reflection of the 24/7 efforts of our city's outstanding firefighters. Would you please join me in thanking the Woodstock Fire Department for standing ever vigilant to keep each and every one of us and our families safe?

I told you last year that the department was granted a new training officer role last year to help prepare the department for continued growth in the future. The department yielded an average of 314 hours of training per employee last year including EMS training, active shooter training, swift water rescue training, and more to make certain that the men and women who arrive on scene when you or your loved ones need them most are prepared to meet the moment. In addition to this widely expanded training, your Council engaged with a third party firm to audit, research and provide recommendations for master planning the future of the Woodstock Fire Department to secure our future and keep up the success of this fantastic agency. The success of our Fire Department is a product of its fantastic leadership. Chief Dave Soumas has served Woodstock in the Fire Department for more than three decades. His constant dedication to his firefighters, and to the constituents he serves, is evident in everything he does. The only bold content on his annual report for me to help me write this speech was "Number of Citizens Reached: 27,451". His focus is always on our citizens, and his work bears that fruit in the form of a service-oriented, excellent department.



This morning, and with mixed emotions, I am sharing for the first time publicly that Chief Soumas is retiring from a decorated career with our city this year. Chief, on behalf of our entire city: We are honored to call you one of our own, and your service to our city will echo in the Woodstock Fire Department for generations of firefighters to come. Thank you for your service, sir.





## Quality of Life

Our city has been hard at work to make certain that the quality of life and amenities that our residents have come to expect are getting even better. In just the last few weeks, our Parks and Recreation Department welcomed a new director, Mr. Brian Borden. Brian comes to us from the City of Brookhaven with a strong background leading cities in parks expansions, which positions him extremely well to execute on Council's vision for the department in the years to come. Join me in welcoming Brian to our city.

In meeting with our Council over the past few weeks to discuss priorities for the year, nearly every member voiced a desire to expand our parks and trail offerings. Just last week, we received final approval from GDOT on our right of way acquisition to complete the connection of our existing Noonday Creek Trail to the Cobb County system, which will connect our city's trails into the Silver Comet Trail and beyond, and we expect to have this connection to Noonday Creek Trail completed in 2024. This, combined with the Community Development Department's initiative to "Connect the Creeks" stands to considerably improve our trail system and the trails' viability as an alternative transportation option.

In addition, Council has voiced loudly their intention to complete Little River Park. We have allocated more than \$8 million of the upcoming SPLOST to completing Phase 1 of Little River Park, and Council is adamant that they wish to see ground breaking. We have finally laid the groundwork to make the "soon" on those "Little River Park Coming Soon" signs on Trickum Road actually mean soon. In a city as active as Woodstock, these offerings are genuine game changers. Transformation trail connections like these and generational park offerings like the 100+ acre Little River Park will stand as investments and gifts to our children and our children's children.



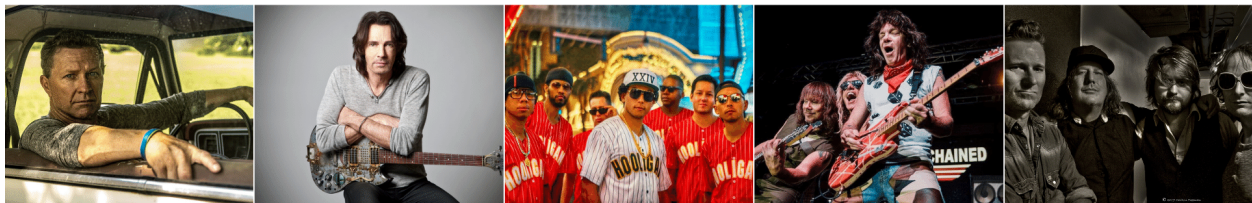
**MAY 13**  
**CRAIG MORGAN**

**JUNE 10**  
**RICK SPRINGFIELD**

**JULY 8**  
**UPTOWN FUNK**

**AUGUST 12**  
**COMPLETELY UNCHAINED**

**SEPTEMBER 9**  
**DRIVIN N CRYIN**



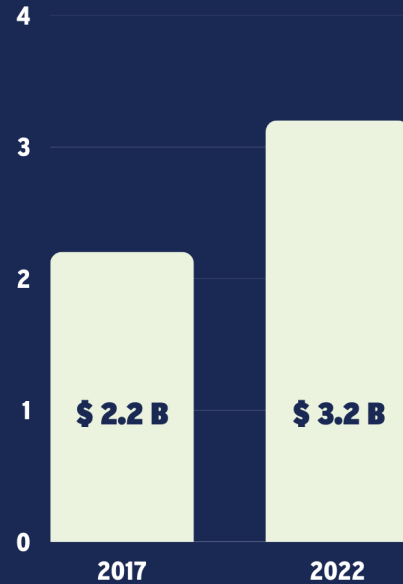
I hope you were able to join us last year for the Summer Concert Series. From Sister Hazel to Scotty McCreery, Woodstock, you showed up to play. It's not unexpected to find our concerts yielding thousands in attendance, and this year is shaping up to be the biggest ever. The 2023 season opens on May 13th with chart-topping country singer-songwriter Craig Morgan. Hits like *Redneck Yacht Club* and *International Harvester* will have downtown Woodstock rocking. Saturday, June 10th, Councilwoman Tracy Collins' long-held wish comes true as Rick Springfield takes the stage at the Northside Hospital-Cherokee Amphitheater. It will be a moment to remember when the Australian-born musician and actor sings his Grammy-winning number one hit *Jessie's Girl*. Bruno Mars Tribute, Uptown Funk, will bring that twenty-four carat magic to the July 8th concert. You'll want to *Jump* when another great tribute act, Completely Unchained, performs Van Halen's greatest hits on August 12th. The season ends on September 9th as southern rock icons Drivin N Cryin rock the stage with original hits like *Fly Me Courageous* and *Straight to Hell*. Woodstock Parks and Rec is adding a lot of value to already great sponsorship packages this year. If you've been thinking about partnering as a sponsor on this outstanding event series, this is the year to do it.

## Economy

Earlier, I described Woodstock as one of the most visited, attractive downtown destinations in the southeastern United States. In a city of 37,000 we attracted 3 million visits to our downtown shopping district last year. If you had tried to tell me, growing up in Woodstock, or even in 2012 when I started representing the city in our State House, that one day our city would boast 3 million visits in a year, I'd have laughed you out of the room. But our city leadership, and our stellar economic development team, saw it. They built a tourism, retail and entertainment destination in downtown Woodstock that competes across our region and is consistently used across the state and nation as an example for main street revitalization.



**LAST FIVE YEARS  
BUSINESS REVENUE**



The success of our local economy yielded more than 350 new business licenses in 2022 and I lost count of the number of ribbon cuttings that I took part in last year. In just the last five years, our city's business revenue grew from \$2.2 billion in 2017 to more than \$3.2 billion in 2021. I had a CEO visiting from out of state who owns one of our major retailers here in Woodstock. I asked him to meet me at Reformation Brewery in the early afternoon, and I was running about five minutes late. As I walked up, he met me with a slightly abnormal greeting: "Mayor, what the hell is wrong with this town?" "Excuse me?" "It's 2:00 PM on a Tuesday and the brewery and the park are FULL. Doesn't anybody here work?" I did remind him of our historically low 2.8% unemployment rate, but who here hasn't visited the brewery or wandered our main street on a weekday afternoon? It's Woodstock. We don't boast busy nightlife. Our main streets are just consistently full of life.



I shared some vague hints during last year's address about one of the most important economic investments in our downtown's history, the City Center project. We have made incredible progress on the project since. This \$100+ million project will transform downtown Woodstock's skyline yet again and bring to our city more than 50,000 square feet of new office space, a 120-room boutique hotel, new conference center space, new restaurants, new retail, new park space, some critical street realignments, and a 647-space parking deck. This project represents a true, fiscally-conservative approach to public-private partnership with the public infrastructure - streets, park, parking deck - being built with public investment and the private portion of the project being entirely paid for with private dollars. The city has executed a development agreement with our contractor for the infrastructure portions of the project, and you will see groundbreaking on the Chambers Street and East Main Street realignments this quarter. This project will significantly enhance the retail offerings downtown, dramatically expand the professional office inventory in our city, and provide critical congestion and parking relief that will have an echoing effect throughout our grid street network and main road arteries. It will be nothing short of transformational.

Speaking of office space, among our primary goals for the coming two years will be commercial diversification. We are a fantastic place to live, work, and play but you can't have all three here. You can either afford to work in the retail and tourism industry that our city supports, and will have a very difficult time affording to live near your job, or you can afford to live and play in our city and must commute far out of town to find work that will support your lifestyle. This is because of a change in behavior in America that has substantially impacted how we see our communities, our society, and our roles as individual Americans. You see, three generations ago, and for the five thousand years prior to it, the normal human behavior was to live near your work. Odds were very high that you lived where you were born, and that you would raise children there just like your parents had. This pattern still exists in the majority of the civilized world today across Europe and Asia, but since the introduction of the automobile, chances are extremely high that you do not live where you were born. Chances are even higher that you do not work where you live. So we must ask ourselves, what does this do to our attitudes about the places we live and work? When the place we work starts to feel worse, what do we do? We find a new job, in a better environment. When the cities we live in start to feel aged, or less than they

once were, what do we do? We move. Long gone are the days that we as citizens feel an individual responsibility in the outcomes of our communities at large. This shift in attitude, the lack of roots and sense of belonging, has a tremendous impact on our national mindset as well. It has resulted in heightened division, in tribalism, and in an increasing inability - and let's admit it, unwillingness - to even be around those with differing opinions. In short, this shift away from a full life spent in community with others has been toxic for the Great American Experiment. We need to attract more small and mid sized employers to our city, that bring high paying jobs that will support the families who already call this place home. As a business owner myself, my partner and I have built a company here in the heart of our city that employs nearly 30 full time, the majority of which live a short distance from where we sit this morning. I know first hand it can be done. There are a tremendous number of business owners who live here in Woodstock, but own companies in surrounding areas because, ten or twenty years ago that was where you wanted to be. Not anymore. It's time to bring those businesses home, to build a sustainable, antifragile, diversified economy here in our home city. It's time that we build a business community that will continue to enhance the sense of place for which our city is so well known.

## Let's Connect!

Give us the opportunity to learn about your needs. We want to help you  
find a home for your business in Woodstock.



So I have my recruiting hat on. To every Woodstocker who owns a business outside of town, it's time for you to work a little closer to home. We're working hard to bring the physical footprints and infrastructure you need to headquarter here. For both new and existing Woodstock businesses alike, we are intent on making sure that our city, like our state, is number one for business. We need to hear from you. We have launched a brand new business recruitment form on our website, and I am looking forward to welcoming each of you here to our city. Let's get this right, let's focus in, and we'll build an economy in Woodstock that can lead the way in restoring the sense of community that America so urgently needs.

## Infrastructure

City Center is by no means our city's only major infrastructure project underway. In fact, during last year's address I shared with you the outstanding work our Assistant City Manager Rob Hogan had done putting together the first ever draft of a Citywide Annual Comprehensive

Transportation Plan. In this room, I challenged our Council to adopt the plan with haste, and they met that calling. We are leaps and bounds ahead of our peer cities with a comprehensive plan, which is publicly available, outlining our city's future transportation initiatives, projected timelines and funding sources, and the impact expected from each. This helps us better interface with other jurisdictions and stakeholders and keeps our policymakers' eyes focused on projects that matter.

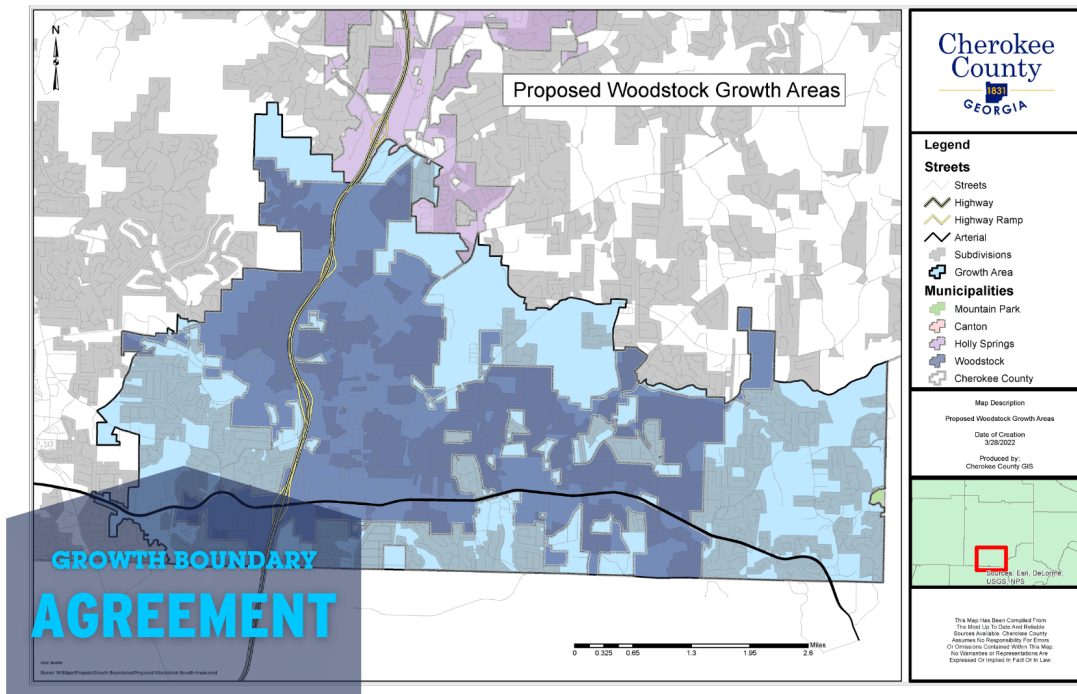
Last year, the Mayors of Cherokee County elected me to represent our cities on the Atlanta Regional Commission. Alongside Chairman Johnston and Steve Stancil, our other two members from Cherokee County, we have managed to secure additional funding for several priority projects for our city and county - including the initial rounds of funding for major intersection improvements on I-575 at both Towne Lake Parkway's Exit 8 and Ridgewalk Parkway's Exit 9. These projects have been on the books for years, but we have made substantial progress in securing funding and moving the ball forward on improving traffic flow in these major congestion points in our city.

Rob Hogan and I ventured down to the Georgia Department of Transportation's statewide headquarters early last year to meet with GDOT Commissioner Russell McMurry to outline Woodstock's priorities and to be sure we remain front of mind for the department. The three of us serving on the ARC, between Cherokee County and the City of Woodstock, kept up this momentum and hosted the lead statewide planner for the Georgia Department of Transportation on a ride along through Woodstock and Cherokee County to provide a boots-on-the-ground perspective on our most critical transportation priorities. Let me be clear, this kind of attention is not normal. With more than 500 cities in Georgia, statewide, top level decision makers don't get to spend time in each of them. I am focused on making sure that Woodstock and Cherokee County are and remain a primary focus for state and regional infrastructure investments, and you'll continue to see me working with our legislative delegation, the Governor's Office, and every leader who will listen to invest in our city's future. In so many ways, we represent the future of this state and nation. I am extremely proud of the investment of time and capital that entities like the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Atlanta Regional Commission are making alongside our city and county to address the infrastructure challenges that come with a thriving city, and the importance that these investments signify for our city's role in our region. As an example, Neese Road acts as a major connection point between Highway 92 and Arnold Mill Road, and has suffered from increasing congestion. I invite you to review the multi-phased plan for roundabouts and enhanced throughput measures, but I am proud to report that with the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank and GDOT's help we are engaged in completing Phase 1 at the Hwy 92/Neese Rd intersection and Phase 2 is already approved to move forward.



The Hub Transformation Project that I shared with you last year is nearing completion. I hope you enjoyed your ride through our new gateway roundabout coming into town this morning, and the two-way traffic pattern on Mill Street is coming soon. As we discussed last year, this first-of-its-kind project will improve traffic flows on seven major arteries in our city and dramatically reduce congestion throughout our downtown district. I promised you orange cones last year. We delivered.

# Quality Growth



## Growth Boundary Agreement

I have mentioned the county several times. I want to highlight one of our most important achievements from last year. In 125 years of our city's history, our city only had a mutually approved growth boundary agreement with our county for two years. If this sounds like inside baseball to you, the agreement is a mutual playbook that serves as a handshake between the county and city on where a city ultimately can and should expand. When property owners request an annexation into the city outside of the growth boundary agreement, the city sends them back to the county first. When property owners approach the county for development projects within the boundary, the county sends them to the city. Without a mutual plan, it shouldn't be shocking that the city and the county were butting heads on annexations and growth. Some of those moments were contentious enough to drive headlines. I made it a personal mission of mine to get this agreement done in my first 100 days in office. I want to thank our Council and the County Commission for taking this initiative seriously. We were able to come to agreement on a unanimously supported map within that first 100 day target. We have seen the agreement in action for nearly a year now, and our governments are working together even more efficiently. For property owners, that means a clearer path to accomplishing what you'd like with your property. For staff, that means less likelihood of being caught up in political tiffs. And most importantly, for taxpayers, that means less time spent on avoidable conflicts and more time executing on a stronger, brighter future for our community. This historic agreement is one of the accomplishments I am the most proud of in our first year. Chairman Johnston, members of Council, thank you for your help in making it happen.



## Community Development

This map is a critical tool in ensuring that the growth that comes in the future is quality growth. Our Community Development Department stretches across new building, code enforcement, development services, and planning and zoning. In 2022, the department permitted an additional \$211 million in construction value and kicked off the year with Council's adoption of the Town Center & 92 Liveable Centers Initiative update. On the Atlanta Regional Commission, I consistently hear praise for our City as a shining example of setting a plan, sticking to the plan, and seeing the results. These guys are the engine behind that planning and execution, and earlier this year, we welcomed a brand new director to the department. Mrs. Tracy Albers came to us with an exemplary career managing development in communities, and as Mayor, Tracy holds one of the roles that I get to interact with the most. I have to say, it has been an absolute pleasure working alongside her and I'm so grateful that we have her at the helm here in Woodstock. Would you join me in thanking Tracy and her entire department for their dedication to preserving the quality of our great city?

Earlier, we mentioned the challenge that our city faces in the live, work, play trifecta. We explored the importance of employer recruitment in building a jobs-base for those who live and play here. Equally important is meeting the challenge of affordability in our housing inventory and providing access to the American Dream for those who work in and support our city today. With housing prices skyrocketing, interest rates and inflation exploding, and new builds slowing, our nation is undergoing a unique housing crisis. One defined by limited inventory, and critically impacting a fundamental component that built the American middle class. For three generations, at every level of government - federal, state, and local - the United States of America has made home ownership a fundamental domestic priority. But why? Each of you business owners in the room will immediately recognize a fundamental truth: You don't build wealth with salary. Wealth is built in equity. But the average American will never own a business. So how do we help them build generational wealth? The universally accessible appreciating asset became the American home, and through it, we built the largest wealth generating mechanism in human history: American home ownership. We built a middle class unparalleled anywhere in the world, and now, with inventory limited and pricing skyrocketed, an entire generation is being excluded from that wealth. When the middle class is under threat, the political stability of America comes under threat, and this should be a primary focus of every government in our nation. It is certainly one of ours.



That is why the ownership/rentership ratio is so critical to my administration. If we want to build a financially sustainable city, we will build it with financially stable people. For generations, financial stability in this nation has been built through home ownership, and by ensuring we provide inventory for aspiring homeowners in Woodstock, we can accomplish that goal. In a city like Woodstock though, that early ownership model won't come with two acres of land and a white picket fence. The product may look more like a townhome or a condo, but the most important characteristic is that it will be owned, and it will be an economic engine for our community and the families who call this place home.

That's where I need your help. In an admirable effort to tackle our state's housing crisis, the Georgia General Assembly is exploring reforms. Among these proposed reforms is an outright prohibition that would prevent Woodstock or any local governments from being able to permit rental inventory or owned inventory differently. Under this new law, we would be required to view a condo building and an apartment complex as if they were the same product. This isn't just inaccurate, it also destroys our ability to build a financially sustainable future. We stand at the ready to provide input as our legislators debate and craft these reforms, and our ask is that they involve us in helping to address this critical challenge to our shared future.

To address this directly, our city has engaged in an additional housing study and we are assessing reforms of our own so that we can continue to work with the private sector to build housing that will meet both the market demand and financial future of our city. I call on our Council today to continue to explore creative ways to meet this demand, and I intend for our city to continue to be a leader in the American foundation of home ownership.

# Information



Core to great planning is great data. Our GIS and IT Departments continue to lead the way in providing the information we need to make generational policy decisions. Our incredible IT Director Jeff Smith has announced his retirement from the city after an excellent career, and I hope you'll join me in thanking him for his outstanding service!

With Jeff's departure, Council will be presented with the option this coming Monday night to combine these two departments into a new information office to be led by a Chief Information Officer for our city. In an era where data has become a commodity more valuable than oil, we are positioning our city to build policies and visions based on an intentional, data-driven approach. Even more importantly, information and data are critical for public accountability. Over the years, you have elected me in large part because of my dedication to open and accountable government. By centralizing information and data, we can continue to focus on transparency and public information initiatives. We have seen serious success on this front over the past year, with new tools like our Major Projects and Transportation Projects maps. If you wonder what those orange cones are for, or how they'll impact the city, you can use these maps to easily locate projects throughout our city limits and learn more about them. In my time in this office, from the city manager down through all 200+ employees, I have witnessed a team of dedicated public servants seeking ways to better involve and inform the public on the city's activity. They are constantly searching for new, innovative ways to share information. We will continue to do everything we can to be sure you have ready access to what is happening here in your city.

# Recap



**PARKS and TRAILS** **W** **COMMERCIAL** **W** **HOME OWNERSHIP**

We covered a lot. In the last year, we accomplished a lot. There is much more ahead of us.

We will continue to expand our parks and trail offerings. The new greenspace, and the connection of our trail system to the communities around us, will create a better, higher quality of life for our residents and visitors. These assets will yield dividends to our community for generations.

We will build a deeper sense of place and connection to our community by attracting employers and jobs to allow more Woodstockers to work near home. In doing so, we will be staking out a secure, diversified commercial future for our city and reigniting the sense of community and pride of place that built an American century.

We will engage and prioritize the largest economic, wealth generating mechanism in human history: American home ownership. By making this appreciating asset more available to those who call Woodstock home, we will be creating a financially stable future for both our city and the families who live here, and we will be creating family-tree-changing-wealth for our citizens.

Parks and trails. Commercial diversification. American home ownership. We have much to do.

## Conclusion



Thank you from the bottom of my heart for letting me serve you in this way. Our family had the honor of serving our city in Georgia's House of Representatives for eight years, and it was the honor of a lifetime, but I can't begin to tell you how special leading this city is to me. It is far more work than the job description would have you believe, but this is the most fun, most rewarding job in the world. I hope to make you proud.

This month we start our 126th year of cityhood. Our city has seen some significant growth and changes over the years, but Woodstock's story remains the same. Our calling in this city unexpected remains the same. We have built a place that people want to be, and we must now set out to build a place that will last. My family and I renew our promise to you from one year ago that we will dedicate ourselves to this mission. With your help, I am confident that we will meet the calling of our time and succeed in building a city that our children will be proud to inherit.

Let's get to work.