

2019 SOTC – Virginia Beach, VA; 03/20/2019

Good afternoon. My name is Bobby Dyer. My friends call me "Bobby D."

I'd like to thank the Hampton Roads Chamber for giving me this opportunity.... I also want to thank the citizens of Virginia Beach for giving me the honor of serving as mayor of this great City.

For the last 14 years, I sat down there with you and watched mayors deliver this annual speech. Now, here I am, as Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander describes me, the rookie mayor of Virginia Beach.

It's hard to believe it's only been four months since I took the oath of office, because so much has happened since that day. By my count, I've gone to more than 90 events; met more than 80 people in my office; attended meetings with more than 35 groups; cut four ribbons, and began discussions with dozens of different organizations.

I have met with members of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce of Hampton Roads, the Hampton Roads Hispanic Chamber, and Communities of Color. Leaders of Higher Education. Military Officers. Regional Planners and Transportation Officials. Environmentalists. A Chief Judge. Civic Leagues. Hoteliers and Restaurateurs. Realtors, Retailers, Reporters and Residents. Business Leaders. City Staff. Athletic Associations. Religious Congregations. U.S. Senators and, of course, Virginia Beach City Council Members. Many of the folks I've met with are here today and I want to thank each of you for giving me two valuable gifts — your time and your input.

I've been able to juggle my work as a physical therapist with my mayoral duties because of the tremendous support I receive from a lot of people — first and foremost, from my incredible wife, Trish; and my son, Damian; and the great staff at Encompass Health — the Virginia Beach company I work for.

From every conversation I've had with people over the last several months, whether they're my patients or prospective businesses looking to relocate to Virginia Beach, I've learned something valuable about what people like... and what they dislike, what they believe, and what they don't believe. What they hope, and what they need. I get the good, the bad and the ugly.

Let me share just a little of what I've learned:

What I hear most is that Virginia Beach is a great place to live because we can feel safe in our homes, neighborhoods and schools....

It is a place where people can seek and achieve prosperity.... A place that provides some of the best schools in the country, and where we enjoy quality public services.... A place where we offer a variety of ways people can engage with and voice their opinions on City issues and make a difference.

I firmly believe good government should never fear an engaged and educated public. We should embrace it and bring the public to the table. That's the way we should be doing business, and that's the way we are doing business.

We are continually looking for ways to expand options for getting input and engaging citizens. From streaming meetings live and growing our social media outreach... to hosting community meetings and adding tools to help us capture broader community feedback, our goal is to provide as many ways for people to participate as possible.

Last year, the City launched PublicInput.com, an engagement hub for outreach and listening.... So far, 20,000 participants have provided nearly 275,000 responses on topics ranging from what elements they want to see in the Dome site project... and what mural should be painted on the steps at Mount Trashmore... to what the City's priorities should be as we look to the future.

One of the great things about this public input platform is that it's mobile friendly. Please bring out your cell phones.... I bet you haven't heard a speaker invite you to do that before!

In your browser, put in publicinput.com/SOTC and our survey should pop up. I'm curious how this crowd — and those of you watching the live stream of this event — would answer some of the same questions we asked people before last month's City Council retreat. Let's check it out.

First question....

Which three of the following words do you hope people are using 10 years from now to describe Virginia Beach?

Take a look at your results....

Take a look at this masterpiece. Along the bottom are words that Virginia Beach City Council members used to describe our city. Embedded in the panels are works of art — created by City Council members — that describe characteristics of our community.

Let me ask a follow-up question now....

To achieve the future you just imagined for Virginia Beach, what are the three most important issues we must address?

Interesting results. It's tough to choose, right? Because each of these priorities is important. [Ad lib]

Keep your phones handy — there will be one more opportunity to participate in questions coming up.

I want to make sure you all know that work is under way throughout the city to ensure Virginia Beach remains a great place to live, work, play and raise a family. Take a look.

It's pretty incredible to see all of the projects going on throughout the districts.

Growing our local economy and bringing new money into our city is a Council priority. One of the ideas we wrestle with — as a Council and in the community — is the role of government, especially when it comes to investing public money in private projects. Let's take a moment to think about some of our community's assets. I'm going to test your knowledge with this next PublicInput.com question. Ready?

Which of the following are the result of a public-private partnership? Select all that apply.

I'll give you a few seconds to make your selections.

Okay — let's take a look....

The Answer: This was a trick question. The City has had some level of investment in all of these projects. And each has helped to grow our economy by expanding our tax base and generating additional revenue.

So how do we decide if we should pursue a partnership?

First, it must advance the City Council's vision and be compatible with the various plans we have, like the Comprehensive Plan.

Second, it must generate synergy and attract additional PRIVATE sector development.

Third, we weigh the benefits and the return on investment to both the city and the private sector partner to decide if a partnership is feasible.

Last but not least, we look to consider projects that would NOT proceed — or would not proceed at a desired quality level — "but for" public sector participation.

All-in-all, the City has invested \$265 million dollars in these projects to build our community's economic vitality and help keep our taxes the lowest in the region. By contrast, the private investment has been more than a billion dollars.

Those of you who know me know this.... I have not always been on board with every public-private partnership the City has considered. But I do know a good deal when it's in front of me.

For every dollar the City has invested, we've received four in return. That's a solid return that has meant money for schools, public safety, roads and other essential City services.

That's why when it comes to the proposed project at the Dome site, I'm all in. Atlantic Park has the potential to transform our resort area into a year-round destination, with something for everyone, including a state-of-the-art surf park, a 3,500-seat live entertainment venue, and new-to-market retail and restaurants in addition to office and residential components.

It's a BIG DEAL that our analysis tells us will reap BIG returns. This project will produce millions in revenue — to cover costs and provide a net gain for the City.

All project-related expenses will be covered by the Tourism Investment Program Fund. This dedicated revenue source was established in 1993 to pay for construction and debt costs of tourism-related projects. Tax revenues from Atlantic Park's first year alone are estimated to top \$8 million dollars — that money will benefit our general fund and our schools.

Clearly, there's Something in the Water. While we are all becoming increasingly aware of this great new festival coming to our city, I wanted to highlight a quick video that Fah-RELL and team have used to rally companies like Sony, Adidas, Verizon, UberEats, Timberland, Live Nation and others to come to Virginia Beach. In total, they are all investing in excess of \$15 million dollars in this festival that directly impacts our city and its potential.... This outpaces almost every other first year festival. Check this out!

[Pharrell Video]

Thank you, Pharrell — we are honored by your commitment to bringing this spectacular event home. I'm "HAPPY" that Pharrell's mom, Dr. Carolyn Williams, is in the audience. Dr. Williams, will you please stand and let us recognize you?

We are constantly striving to advance Virginia Beach — all of Virginia Beach. Great things are happening here. Let's review highlights of the past year....

This is the 10th year in a row that Virginia Beach bonds have been rated triple-A, the highest possible, by all three major bond rating agencies. No other city in Hampton Roads has perfect bond ratings. It's an achievement that saves millions every year when financing capital projects.

Virginia Beach continues to be the nation's safest large city and our crime rate is still the lowest it's been since the 1960s. Overall crime was down in 2018, and over the last 12 years, the City's violent crime rate has steadily decreased.

The City partnered with Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story and opened a joint fire station to reduce response times in the North End, improve survivability and provide improved mutual aid capacity. This is the first partnership of its kind between military and civilian fire departments.

The Sheriff's Office Reentry Program successfully prepared inmates to reenter society — 85 to 90 percent of participants did not commit new crimes after their release from jail.

Human Services' Mental Health partnered with the Virginia Beach Police Department and Emergency Medical Services to implement a new Mobile Co-Response Team that dispatches a behavioral health clinician with first responders to address crisis calls for service and ensure individuals are referred for appropriate treatment and other services.

And, EMS rolled out, PulsePoint, a mobile app linked to 9-1-1 that notifies users of cardiac arrests in nearby public places and the location of the closest AED. Now, trained citizens can start CPR and potentially save lives as public safety personnel are in transit.

For the second year, 100 percent of public schools in Virginia Beach earned full accreditation from the Commonwealth of Virginia. City schools also achieved an all-time high graduation rate and had the lowest ever dropout rate.

Because child well-being and thriving communities go hand-in-hand, Virginia Beach says "Yes" to supporting early childhood learning. That's why Virginia Beach offers LENA Start, an innovative program that works to ensure all children start school ready to learn.

The Virginia Aquarium and Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation implemented special programming for individuals with sensory processing disorders. Special Needs Under the Sea and Touch-a-Truck events offered sensory-friendly fun in calm, quiet environments.

Last year we opened doors on new businesses and homes in Town Center. The latest phase added Pottery Barn and Williams Sonoma, as well as Zeiders American Dream Theater and 131 apartment-homes to the mix. The block represents a \$42 million dollar investment, with 38 million in private and \$4 million dollars in public funds.

In 2018, 13 local businesses received grants totaling \$2.75 million dollars through the City's Economic Development Investment Program which leveraged \$207 million dollars in capital investment... and created more than 550 jobs.

The Authority also facilitated the second year of the City's ViBe Creative District Matching Grant Program. The grants provided financial support to 12 small, locally-owned and operated businesses in the ViBe. The money is used to make improvements to buildings and façades and to purchase equipment to expand or modernize a business. Over the past two years, matching grants totaling \$75,000 dollars have leveraged \$375,000 dollars in capital investment.

We helped provide start-up companies with the tools they need to succeed.

Twenty start-up companies have participated in the VaBeachBio Innovation Challenge, which aims to grow the bio-medical ecosystem in our community. The Challenge focuses on taking therapeutics, vaccines and devices for veteran-related illnesses from the lab to production to address a variety of health concerns... including cardiovascular and neurological disorders, diabetes, oncology and regenerative medicine.

Through partnerships with 1701 Coworking and 757Accelerate, several start-ups have gotten specialized support. For example, a new, three-month long Entrepreneur in Residence program is sponsoring two local businesses, Brink Records and Home Remedy Concierge, at 1701's collaborative co-working space.

And 757 Accelerate graduated its first cohort of five companies in 2018. This program connects promising start-ups with vetted mentors, investors, resources, and educational opportunities — to help start-ups do more, faster.

It's this start-up ecosystem that helps make Virginia Beach a desirable place to open a business. And these are the types of accomplishments that help make Virginia Beach the preferred Coastal City on the Atlantic.

Put it all together, and what does it mean?

It means Virginia Beach is a City of Positivity — where people can hold and express different points of view respectfully... to create common ground and constructive solutions.

It means Virginia Beach is a City of Inclusion — with a level playing field where everyone feels welcome and able to pursue their full potential.

It means Virginia Beach is a City of One — a diverse and caring community where people of all ages, all backgrounds, and all abilities look out for one another.

All told, it means Virginia Beach is the "City of Yes" — the preferred Coastal City... a place that attracts people who share a vision for a robust economy that provides quality jobs to match the quality environment, and where small businesses can start up and then scale up.

More than 90 percent of all businesses in Virginia Beach have 50 or fewer employees. And we're working to streamline City processes to make it easier to open shop in Virginia Beach. For businesses small and large to succeed here, we must be a "City of Yes."

The "City of Yes" — an energetic year-round destination that enables us to continue to grow our largest industry and keep a tight grip on the amount of taxes we have to pay for essential services like public safety, education, libraries, parks and rec, road construction and our most critical service — stormwater management and flood control.

We are currently working on several initiatives to ignite the "City of Yes"....

Knowing that libraries cultivate the genius in young minds, we are going to equip every Virginia Beach City Public Schools student with a Virginia Beach Public Library account, via their school I.D. cards.

We are going to focus on attracting investments to areas that have high potential to make big impacts — I'm talking about areas designated as Opportunity Zones, thanks to a program Congress established in 2017. Seatack, Hilltop, Corporate Landing, the Lynnhaven Corridor, the Central Business District and Burton Station are ripe for these investments.

Those of you who know me well know that I am a champion of small businesses who believes collaboration is a key to success. I am convinced that strategies for small business growth can be enhanced through partnerships with local universities, incubators, accelerators, mentoring programs and access to capital.

Taking a cue from the Research Triangle area of North Carolina, I'm excited to announce that I am forming a coalition of higher education institutions in the region that will partner with the City to boost our economic vitality.

And, because I believe so strongly in seeking advice from subject matter experts, I'm also forming a couple of advisory committees, one for business and one for technology. These advisers will help guide our efforts in these areas by identifying obstacles and emerging trends so we can stay competitive and help businesses grow.

Other initiatives designed to boost our business are in the works, as well. Our Economic Development team will rev up our partnerships with the Small Business Development Center, the Hampton Roads Procurement Assistance Center at ODU, and the City's Purchasing Office to provide targeted training and assistance for small, women-owned and minority-owned businesses... to further their success for doing business IN the city... and for doing business WITH the City.

Building on the success of our ViBe District grant program, I am advocating for the creation of a District Investment Program to provide matching capital investment grants to businesses in commercial districts across the city, so they have help upgrading their storefronts and interior spaces.

We'll also be investing time and energy in major public education initiatives, including a regional forum later this year, to shed more light on some of the most important issues we face — stormwater, recurrent flooding and sea level rise. The amount of money we will need to mitigate flooding requires us to commit to long-term education and funding strategies.

None of this will be successful unless we make sure Virginia Beach remains viable in the years ahead. That's why I am establishing a Mayor's Commission on Environmental Resilience and Sea

Level Rise. We must build on the work of the Dewberry study and turn words into actions so Virginia Beach combats these threats and preserves the great quality of life we all enjoy.

The sum total of all of these projects propel us closer to being a "City of Yes" — a place where the next generation of entrepreneurs can prosper. To make our "City of Yes" rock-solid and sustainable, we must ensure that living in Virginia Beach is desirable, viable, and achievable.

To do this, we must continue to think and act regionally. Homelessness, fire response, transportation, drinking water and high-speed broadband are areas in which we have had successful regional collaborations. We must continue to reach beyond the borders of Virginia Beach to work on issues like public safety, flood control and technological advances.

In fact, even before the transatlantic fiber cables reached our shores, Virginia Beach saw opportunity to connect with the rest of the world and meet the ever-growing demands for more data capacity at faster speeds. We also saw the opportunity to create a local broadband network to more effectively move data around the entire region, providing speeds of up to 100 gigabytes per second — per second! — and connecting public facilities and private internet service providers.

Think about it — every company with big data needs, including financial services, health information, the media and cybersecurity — relies on access to fast and secure digital infrastructure to meet the demands of their customers. Our regional fiber ring is the essential infrastructure we need to create 21st century jobs while offering the fastest and most reliable access available.

We are better together and we are stronger together, and I'd like to recognize some of the organizational partners helping us expand our regional collaborations. Brian Stephens of the Hampton Roads Chamber; Robert Crum of the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission; and Jim Spore of Reinvent Hampton Roads — will you please stand and let us recognize your efforts.

I'm a Jersey Boy — which I think you can probably hear in my voice. I had a wonderful childhood in Newark, New Jersey, but after serving my country in the Marines, I chose to settle here in Virginia Beach. . . and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else, especially this time of year.

Apparently, the word is spreading.

Forbes magazine named Virginia Beach one of "The 16 Most Beautiful Places to Travel to this Spring." The article talked about how visitors can hand-pick fresh strawberries and enjoy other farm

fresh foods in our local cafes and restaurants. Virginia Beach was ranked on this list along with Geneva, Switzerland; Tel Aviv, Israel; Istanbul, Turkey; and Mexico City.

It's not hard to understand what makes Virginia Beach so special. From the County to the Bay, here's a sample of the beauty, character and culture that make our vibrant coastal community a wonderful place to be.

Doesn't that make you proud to call Virginia Beach home?

What else makes us proud? The heroic leadership and sacrifices of our military service men and women. Hard to believe Naval Air Station Oceana celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

As the first veteran to be directly elected to the Office of Mayor in Virginia Beach, I am especially honored to ask all members of the military — both active duty and prior service — to please stand up and let us salute you.

Our City Council is the most diverse it's ever been, and we are working with each other — and with citizens — like never before. Will all members of the Virginia Beach City Council please stand and let us recognize you?

Virginia Beach is blessed. Where else can you find the abundance we enjoy? We have the greatest parks, beaches and scenic waterways. We have incredible libraries, recreation centers and public schools. And behind all of it stands an army of volunteers 15 thousand people strong who donate more than one million hours to the City of Virginia Beach. The monetary value of their service tops \$27 million dollars, and saves more than a nickel on the real estate tax rate.

Will all those who work and volunteer for the City and Schools please stand and let us give you a round of applause.

Friends — we have NO control over what happens in Washington.

We have LITTLE control over what happens in Richmond.

But we CAN control what happens here in Virginia Beach.

I ran for Mayor so I could work with everyone in this community to help Virginia Beach achieve its full potential. Join me in making civility and respect for each other pillars of our dialogue so we can bring about solutions that address our most difficult challenges.

I promise you this — we will engage the people of Virginia Beach in efforts to decide the best solutions for our future. We must never lose sight of the fact that the strength of our city is the people who live and work here. Join me -- as ambassadors and advocates. Contribute your ideas and help advance our community.

Today is the first day of spring. The signs of change are all around us. It's a time for new beginnings, so let's work together and plant the seeds of success for Virginia Beach to become the "City of Yes."