

2019 SOTC – Cary, NC; 03/12/19

I am proud to be the Mayor of Cary, North Carolina one of the greatest communities in the country. It gives me great pleasure to present my 12th State of Cary address. As we begin this year, we are once again well-positioned for the year ahead. We have a culture of managing your money wisely, an exceptional staff, and a dedicated Council to fulfill our citizen's vision and highest priorities articulated in the Imagine Cary Community Plan. It is an exciting time to be in Cary as we make our remarkable community even better.

As some of you know, in my day job, I work at SAS, which means I love numbers. So, get ready for the latest numbers on Cary; here we go!

As of January 1, 2019, Cary, was approximately 60 square miles with a population of 166,080 citizens. Our population growth rate was approximately a 2.5% increase over the last 12 months, which is consistent with Cary's 2.4% growth rate of the last five years. We are the 7th largest municipality in the state and the 2nd largest town in the nation. Our citizens enjoy the highest quality of life with the lowest tax rate in Wake County.

Cary continues to be recognized nationally with dozens of accolades. Recently, Money Magazine named Cary its 5th best place to live in the country. And we remain one of the safest communities in the nation. Other accolades include:

- #9 Safest city in America, Cary, SmartAsset
- #6 Best Place to Live in America, Cary, HomeSnacks
- #4 Most Livable Mid-Sized City in the U.S., Cary, SmartAsset
- #3 Most internet-connected municipality in U.S., Cary, NDIA
- #3 Best Midsize Real-Estate Market, Cary, WalletHub
- #1 Best North Carolina City for Income Equality, Cary, American Community Survey
- #25 City Where Millennials Are Buying Homes, Cary, SmartAsset
- #2 Healthiest Housing Market in North Carolina, Cary, SmartAsset
- #13 Best Soccer City in America, Cary, WalletHub
- #14 Safest City for Drivers, Cary, Allstate
- Umstead Ranked #1 Hotel in North Carolina, Cary, U.S. News & World Report
- #7 Best Big City for Jobs, Raleigh-Cary MSA, Forbes

Our citizens are highly educated and from diverse backgrounds, with two-thirds having college degrees and one fourth having advanced degrees. The average family income is around \$100,000 per year. Less than 10% of our adults were born and raised in Cary,

and roughly 20% were born in another country. Over 60 different nationalities call Cary home, with those of Asian descent representing our largest minority at about 8%.

Once again, I am thankful to be able to report that we begin the year in a very strong financial position, holding the highest rating from all three major bond rating agencies.

Capital projects continue to make up a significant portion of our budget. Currently Cary has about \$1 billion committed to 198 active capital projects. Of those committed projects 59% are utilities, 21% are transportation, 9% parks, 4% downtown, 2% fire, and 5% for various other projects.

Our economy is robust as we continue to attract jobs and corporate headquarters to Cary, even though the national outlook is somewhat uncertain as evidenced by the wild swings in stock market. Last year we added 202 jobs and since 2007, we have added over 13,000 jobs. Local economists continue to describe Cary as "well-positioned" and "flexible." Our unemployment rate is lower than the state and national average at around 3%. For the last several years, there are more people traveling to work in Cary rather than leaving Cary to work elsewhere.

Cary has experienced a renewed economic benefit from its major sports and entertainment venues now that the HB2 legislation was partially repealed. ACC and National Championships are once again being played at the WakeMed Soccer Park, the USA Baseball National Training Center, and the Cary Tennis Park. And National and international acts are now returning to Booth Amphitheater.

If we are to continue to grow our economy and compete in the global marketplace it is important that we put our best foot forward like never before. As a result, Cary has initiated a Community Branding campaign led by North Star Destination Strategies. One-on-one interviews with Town Council members and other key community stakeholders have been conducted. In October, a vision survey was distributed to nearly 500 business and community leaders. In November, additional structured interviews, focus groups, and informal conversations with citizens, workers, and visitors in various spots around town were conducted. A public input phase is currently ongoing through the end of January. This will allow everyone who works and/or lives in Cary to provide feedback through a community-wide survey on the town's website. The results from all these efforts are being analyzed and expected to be presented this summer. Then we'll have recommendations and be able to move into the fun and exciting create process.

The revitalization of our downtown continues to make progress. The new Cary Regional library is approximately 50% complete and is on schedule to be completed this summer. It will be open in the fall after all the books and furnishings have been moved into the building. The adjacent seven-level, 600 space parking deck is also about 50% complete.

The prefabricated deck is being assembled on site using a 240-tall crane. The deck is on scheduled to be completed this summer and open to users this fall. A proposal for a mixed-use development that will wrap the parking deck is in the early stages of review. We should hear more about this proposal this spring.

The 2nd phase of the Downtown Park continues to move forward. The national award-winning Office of James Burnett was chosen as our consultants to design the second phase of the park, which is seven acres. In Our first public meeting was attended by over 300 citizens and over 1200 people completed an online survey for the project. In addition, over 200 teens from our Teen Council provided input for the park. Our consultants stated that they have never experienced participation like we have for the Downtown Park project. In November we held our second public meeting, which was also well attended. The park master plan is being finalized with a hope for Council approval this spring. Once the plan for the downtown park is approved, its design and construction will need to be financed, most likely thought a General Obligation Bond Referendum.

General Obligation bonds allow us to finance big projects like the next phase of the park at the lowest interest rates possible. Staff is working to see if we can be ready to put a potential bond referendum on the ballot this fall. We'll know more this spring.

Switching for a minute from the public sector to the private sector, specifically to our Eastern Cary Gateway, the largest development in Cary's history, a 92-acre development between Cary Towne Center and Wake Med Soccer Park, received all of its approvals in 2018 after several years of reviews. If the project, which is called Fenton, builds out to its proposed maximum amount of development, it would have the office space equivalent to five MetLife buildings, a number of dwellings similar to the units in the Silverton Planned Unit Development, and retail space just shy of the amount of floor area in almost two Waverly Places. There will also be multiple community gathering areas and parking decks integrated throughout the project. Fenton's master developer will bear all upfront costs to construct significant public facilities in and around the development to accommodate all the new jobs and residents, things like streets, stormwater facilities, and greenways. And the Town will reimburse the developer after significant development milestones are reached. In addition, all eligible office space will be designed to achieve an ENERGY STAR score of 75 or greater. The developer has indicated that they would like to begin grading the site this spring with building construction following and opening businesses sometime in 2020. Phase one of this development will include a Wegmans grocery. Another Wegmans is planned for the Twin Lakes development.

Next to the Fenton is the Cary Towne Mall. The owners have put the property up for sale and are soliciting bids from potential investors. The current owners of the mall hope to close on the property later this year. The Town will be eager and ready to work closely with the new owners on redevelopment.

As important as development and, especially, redevelopment is to Cary's future, one of the concerns that sometimes arises is stormwater. Stormwater flooding is not only an issue in Cary but all over the country. The solution to this problem is expensive and complicated but the town is committed alleviating this problem over time. This past year the Town initiated an Adaptive Stormwater Pilot Program in the Walnut Creek Watershed, which includes the area downtown east of Academy Street. A new scientific model was developed to predict impacts from flooding and a proactive maintenance program was initiated. In addition, several recommendations were made to assist with flooding concerns for areas developed prior to the year 2000. Since 2000, the Town has prohibited development in flood prone areas, effectively eliminating concerns in those areas. The Town will continue to test other new technologies, including sensors and notification systems in Walnut Creek, while beginning to develop a model for the Swift Creek Watershed, which includes a large portion of the pre-2000 development areas in the Town.

The bottom line on stormwater is that the Town is leading the way in coupling traditionally proven solutions with new and innovative ways to keep flooding at bay, and Cary citizens are working alongside staff as never before to improve this aspect of our community.

Infrastructure, especially transportation, is essential in making sure our citizens and businesses have a high quality of life. Several street improvement projects are being planned or are underway.

Private utility companies are working to relocate their utilities at the intersections of Evans Road at Cary Parkway, Kildaire Farm Road at Cary Parkway, and Maynard Road at High House Road. Road construction has begun at the intersection of Evans Road at Cary Parkway with construction completion scheduled for Summer 2019. Construction should begin on Kildaire Farm Road at Cary Parkway and Maynard Road at High House Road in the Spring of 2019 and completed in the Fall of 2019.

The Cary Parkway and High House Road intersection improvements project is nearing completion with the new left and right turn lanes having opened to traffic in December. Aesthetic enhancements, including stamped brick crosswalks, a bus shelter, and landscaping are currently ongoing. Duke Energy Progress has also installed most of

the pedestrian level decorative lighting. The project is expected to be full complete this spring.

The Reedy Creek Road widening project is currently in the process of securing right-of-way and easements needed for the construction. Staff is also working with Wake County Public Schools to show how the roundabout design could help with internal flow within the school property during student drop off times. Construction is anticipated to begin in the Fall of 2019.

Louis Stephens Drive Extension from O'Kelly Chapel Road to Poplar Lane is currently in the process of right-of-way acquisition and design. This \$3 million project should begin in the next few months.

The Carpenter Fire Station Rail Separation Project began construction. Utility relocations by Duke Energy were completed in the fall and other water and sewer utility relocations will be completed later this spring with grading of the railroad track detour following.

Long range transportation improvement projects include the \$133.8 million Highway 64 Corridor Improvements between US1 and Laura Duncan Road. NCDOT is currently receiving public comment within the next few months. This will be followed by right-of-way acquisition next year and construction in 2022. Carpenter Fire Station Widening West of NC 55 anticipates receiving \$2.5 million in LAPP funding for right of way and easement acquisition this year. Right of way acquisition is scheduled to begin in 2020 with construction set to start in 2022.

Cary's first greenway was constructed 40 years ago. We now have a system of trails that exceeds 80 miles. The town continues to focus on closing gaps in greenways to create connectivity.

The White Oak greenway now connects to the 23-mile long American Tobacco Trail. Before the end of 2020 the Town will complete the final segment of White Oak Creek located in MacArthur Park. This includes a 102-foot tunnel under the railroad and 916 feet of concrete boardwalk.

The Town has also completed the Crabtree Creek Greenway located along the southern edge of Lake Crabtree. Morrisville is completing their segment of the Crabtree Greenway, and when completed there will be a continuous greenway from the Black Creek Greenway to Davis Drive, a length of over 5 miles.

The Black Creek Greenway is one of the Town's oldest greenways and has sustained repeated flood damage during storms. A renovation project from Maynard Road to the north terminus at the Lake Crabtree dam is underway. The project will widen the trail to

10 feet, re-route or elevate it where possible to reduce flooding, and replace asphalt with concrete in flood prone areas. A new section from Dynasty Drive to bypass the steep sidewalk connection along Dynasty will complete the last gap in the Black Creek Greenway.

Important national issues are also important to Cary. Police body cams, the opioid crisis, and electronic scooters have all resulted in actions by Cary.

To capture and preserve interactions between police officers and the public, promote officer safety, and assist with investigations, the Town of Cary is in the process of providing our officers synchronized body-worn and in-car digital camera systems. This initiative included a year of study and all our officers should have body cameras this summer.

In February 2018 the Town was awarded a \$100,000 grant by the Bloomberg Philanthropies to implement a pilot project of using the results from sampling wastewater for the concentration of various opioid metabolites in a public outreach campaign combatting the stigma associated with drug misuse and addiction. This project received national recognition for its creative use of technology and data to combat the nation's most pressing health issue. This is so important because two-thirds of people that misuse prescription opioids get them from family or friends, 20% of NC high school students have used prescription opioids "recreationally". In addition, Cary has seen a reduction of overdose deaths during the last year due to all officers carrying Narcan with around 10 overdose deaths in 2016 and 2017 while last year we only had 2. While that is encouraging, we need to bring that number down to 0. To do your part talk with your doctor about the medicine they are prescribing to you, always properly secure your medicines, and safely dispose of old, expired and unused medicine.

Another hot topic that is being debated regionally and nationally is electronic scooters. These scooters are operating in Triangle cities and including Cary as of late September. In December the council addressed this topic by updated an existing ordinance prohibiting obstructions of any type in public areas such as streets, sidewalks, and greenways. So, while scooters will still be allowed they cannot be put in areas that may create safety hazards.

As we move into 2019 it is essential that Cary continue to have a strong council. Many decisions this year and coming years will be proposals of infill and redevelopment which are almost always controversial. It will be important for council to distinguish between projects that make our community better and those that will not. Additionally, it is critical for council members to understand and make the citizen's vision in the Imagine Cary Community Plan a reality. Fortunately, Cary's council members are caring,

dedicated, and knowledgeable with 90 years of experience. These men and women continue to sacrifice so that Cary can be the best it can be. I am very proud to be one among them and look forward to our working together again this year.

Cary's staff saw changes in key staff positions in 2018. We said goodbye to our beloved Police Chief Tony Godwin in December after 28 years of service to Cary citizens. A nationwide search is ongoing for his replacement. Meanwhile Assistant Police Chief Toni Dezomits is serving as the Town's Interim Chief. Allan Cain, Cary's Fire Chief since 2003, was promoted to Cary's New Public Safety Director position. Deputy Chief Mike Cooper was named as Cary's new Fire Chief. We are blessed to have such great talent in Cary. Congratulations to Chief Cooper, Director Cain, and Interim Chief Dezomits.

While a good council can create great policy, it takes a team of experts to make it a reality. Fortunately, Cary's exceptional staff, led by the one-of-a-kind Sean Stegall, IS the best of the best. They believe it is essential to focus on capital planning and operational efficiencies. This is especially timely since citizen's demand for higher service levels continues upward on an exponential path. This inspiring group of over 1200 is not only committed to meeting high citizen expectations but is on a mission of becoming, as Sean says, the local government that doesn't exist.

A big part of Cary's mission is customer service. A pilot program to support citizen-centric operations, called Cary 311, is currently being tested by a cross-departmental group. In the last several months efforts included identifying and aligning appropriate technology platforms,

creating and testing methods of cross-training, and physically building a space to house the center. Cary 311 will be a centralized source of truth that will give citizens the correct information to make the best decisions. We believe this civic infrastructure is a necessity for the information age. This endeavor, which is equal parts technology and organizational flexibility, should be ready this time next year.

To realize our citizens' vision of future Cary and to be the local government that doesn't exist requires us to make major strides in technology. During this past year Cary has become a leader in how to use technology to serve its citizens. Data and systems are now integrated so that responses to citizens can be faster, more flexible, and more innovative. Staff is constantly evaluating scenarios of how citizens interact with their government and are looking for ways to make that interaction more efficient. And this new approach to technology allows staff to transcend boundaries and silos, see opportunities rather than walls, evolve to meet a variety of needs and serve citizens in an individualized way rather than a one size fits all. Some examples of how we are using technology include allowing citizen to interact with Alexa and Amazon for town services;

Requesting immediate assistance to do things like accessing the dog park by texting 311; Having an integrated Traffic Signal system so that when a signal goes on flash a service ticket will be automatically created, crews will be dispatched, and information will be sent to apps like Waze; Having available parking space information at the entrance to parking lots that was tracked with sensors; and Workers using technology like iPads to get comprehensive information across all systems about a citizen during a service call.

As we boldly go where no community has gone before we should never forget what made Cary great. And we should preserve, protect, and celebrate our history. Cary was founded 148 years ago, and we are already planning our yearlong celebration for our 150th anniversary. This past summer, the Council approved the 150th Citizen Task Force. We have had one meeting and another scheduled for this month.

This year we will face many challenges. While our state and nation are focusing more on partisan divide we are focusing on our citizens and our community. I am proud to be a mayor of a community that puts aside political parties and embraces all kinds of diversity and values partnerships like the ones between our citizens, government, and our businesses. If we continue to come together to address our challenges we can and will accomplish amazing things and continue to be one of the most successful communities in the nation.

Thank you for allowing me this time to update you on the State of Cary. I am proud to be the mayor of such a great place. I wish you all the best in 2019.