



**STATE OF THE CITY
MAYOR GARY FULLER
FEBRUARY 1, 2019**

Auburn Opelika Marriott at Grand National

At the beginning of each new year, it's my honor, duty and pleasure to share with you the State of the City... what we did together last fiscal year and where the city stands now as we move into the new year, which happened for us October 1, 2018.

First let me express gratitude and appreciation for some people who have greatly impacted our city. A heart full of thanks and gratitude to the leaders who came before me... Stanley Drake, DB Jones, TK Davis, Bobby McCullough, Bobby Huling, Guy Thompson, Bobby Freeman, Miles Thomas, Barbara Patton, Anne Grady, Jerry Teel, George Bandy, Clarence Harris, Dr. Bill Lazenby and others... to our city council, department heads and outstanding employees. Your dedication, wisdom and service to the people of Opelika is most appreciated. In addition, a special thanks to our first responders (police officers, firefighters and EMT's) who keep us safe, day and night, and to the people of Opelika: young and old; business owners and industry leaders; teachers and students; veterans; and to our

church leaders and social workers —and, especially our volunteers.... we deeply appreciate you. Thank you.

As I finish my 14th year as your Mayor, I am happy to report that 2018 was another great year for the City of Opelika. It's exciting to see how our small conservative town has flourished to become one with cutting edge technologies, amazing downtown amenities, a vibrant workforce and good job opportunities.

The economic forecast for Opelika looks bright! Just look back at investment and job creation that has been created and is now coming on line. Over the past five years world class companies in Opelika (like Golden State Foods, Car Tech, Aerocosta, Baxter, Mando and others) have invested more than \$700 million and created an additional 710 new good paying jobs.

This investment means additional property tax revenue for the city, and more importantly for Opelika City Schools, and new jobs mean more people are working and have disposable income. More income for citizens translates to a better standard of living for our families and additional sales tax revenues and those revenues are reinvested in our community to improve the quality of life. Prosperity is evidenced by our upward trend over the past five years...in 2018 we recorded almost \$32 million in total sales tax revenues.

New retail developments are currently underway at Tiger Town, Pepperell Parkway, USA TownCenter, Saugahatchee Square and more.

In 2018, we opened two additional hotels, Home 2 Suites and La Quinta and the Marriott at Grand National completed construction of their new state-of-the-art spa, which is now open and truly world class! Earlier the Marriott opened some 92 new rooms to move their capacity to over 200 rooms. Downtown Opelika, which is the heartbeat of our City, has become a destination location for shopping, dining and entertainment. And the city continues to deploy smart city technology with the addition of accessible Wi-Fi downtown, which will only enhance the dining and shopping experience.

New jobs also bring new residents to Opelika. New home construction in our community is at an all-time high. Last year we permitted more than 250 new homes and with more than 115 single family lots ready for home construction and almost 700 more lots under review or development.

There will also be an additional 204 apartments units and 148 townhouses added in 2019. Fiscal Year 2018 total building permits remained strong at 590 for a total value of \$127.6 million dollars.

We continue to grow and with that comes the need for updates, construction projects and roadwork. The new police department and municipal court building is coming along nicely. We are on schedule and anticipate construction to be completed in the Fall. Then we will demolish the old building, build the K-9 unit and complete the parking area. The total project should be complete by the end of the year or early 2020. We're all going to be proud of this new facility, especially our great police officers and Municipal Court personnel! We expect our investment to be less than \$19,000,000 and we don't anticipate

incurring new debt to pay for it. Our next major project is to plan a major renovation at Lewis Cooper Jr. Memorial Library. From FY17 to FY18 the library increased programming by 120% (from 144 programs in FY17 to 317 programs in FY18) and attendance at those programs went from 3,984 to 6,918! Director Rosanna McGinnis, with help from the Library Board and Chair Dr. Cathy Long, continues to lead her team in meeting the needs of the community and developing the library as a strong community hub to make Opelika even better than it is today.

Among other departmental news, Chief Bryon Prather and his team responded to more than 5,000 calls this year. Fifteen of which involved a structure fire. They have settled in to the new headquarter building and continue to provide exceptional service to our citizens. It won't be too long before we'll begin planning to build a new 5th firehouse somewhere in the City that will serve future growth. Parks and Recreation added a new swim coach – U.S. Olympic gold medal winner Tyler McGill. He is very busy evaluating, improving and leading the Opelika team, as well as administering a new elite learn-to-swim program. Sam Bailey and his staff have done a great job to bring in some large, revenue generating events like the Alabama Recreation and Parks Association State Swim meet, where our Opelika team took the win. With our new Pickle Ball Stadium, I expect us to soon be hosting tournaments in that facility. The city council approved several major park renovations including Bandy Park, as well as a new dog park at Floral. We also graciously received a donation from the Stern Foundation for a dog park and walking space for the city...thank you J and Ginger. We are in process of planning renovations and improvements at Covington Rec Center and Shady Park.

We completed several road and construction projects in FY18 and have plans for more improvements in 2019. Cunningham Bridge, the Sportsplex Connector Road and the Frederick Road – Auburn Street/MLK roundabout were three projects that had everyone jumping for joy when they were completed. And, most are happy with the new roundabout at TigerTown! In the coming year, we are committed to continuing our ADA sidewalk compliance project, the 1st Avenue streetscape plan between North 7th and North 8th Streets and to install additional roundabouts within the city. Watch for the city's On Tract magazine in the mail in the next few weeks for a full listing of engineering projects.

We made a major decision this past year to sell the OPS One telecommunications network to Point Broadband. The transaction was finalized on November 8 and will allow for expanded coverage beyond the city limits of Opelika and into underserved neighborhoods in Lee County. Thanks to Derek Lee and his OPS crew we accomplished our goals which were to build a fiber network throughout the city for Smart Grid and to bring competition for Charter. We would have never been Alabama's First Gig City without our involvement. Point Broadband will be very successful. Our power company remains strong, serving more than 13,000 customers, and is committed to our core mission of keeping the lights on!

While we enjoy the good news, there are challenges we must face head on. One notable initiative that we have set in motion is a Commission on Crime and Violence. Thirty-six of our brightest and wisest community

leaders are working to reduce crime and violence in Opelika by focusing on families, youth, education and resources. We want to begin rebuilding the nuclear family which is the basic social unit consisting of parents and children living in one household. We are working on strategies and programs to help strengthen the family. I appreciate everyone who agreed to serve on this important committee. In addition to the crime commission, the city is working with Auburn University to implement various technologies including dynamic LED lighting that will automatically adjust to various conditions to allow dimming and brightening. Auburn University is studying the effects this has on communities and public safety. The results of these studies will help ensure we are investing in technologies that make a difference in our communities.

Another way we are reaching out to families and individuals in need is through the Opelika Neighborhood Mobile Wellness Clinic. We know that poor health and lack of basic services lead to chronic stress, unsafe housing, crime and violence, inadequate transportation and a crumbling of the family unit. Therefore, we will be on the road to health in 2019, delivering healthcare directly to Opelika neighborhoods. We will provide health screenings, preventative services, basic primary care and supportive resources at no charge to address health disparities in Opelika. We're proud to partner with Casey Family Foundation, East Alabama Medical Center and Auburn University in this important initiative.

An ongoing and frustrating challenge is litter, clutter and people simply not taking pride in the way our community looks. This affects the way

visitors and potential businesses and industries view us. It's important to me and the city council that we set the example by enforcing our ordinances and making a positive impact on the cleanliness of Opelika. This past year, our Code Enforcement division opened 282 {and closed 252} weed cases, leading to 38 weed abatements. In addition, they opened 117 {and closed 100} inoperable vehicles cases. Due to enforcement of our Property Maintenance Code in FY18, we demolished 18 structures, repaired six structures and sold 12 properties to new owners who are working to repair them. In addition, our Public Works department (ESG) has added more crews to better manage litter throughout the city.

Another challenge we are facing is with recycling. We are asking citizens to be diligent about what they put in the recycling bins. We are having a serious problem with contamination, which could ultimately stop our recycling program if we don't improve. To help decrease contamination, we will be making some changes at our recycling convenience sites in the future. Our curbside recycling program is successful with 950 customers and most everyone is doing a good job putting the correct materials in their bins. The Environmental Services team will be pushing out a contamination campaign for citizens in the coming months.

Before I close, please make a note on your calendar to vote "yes" on February 19 for the county-wide education property tax renewal. This is not a new tax, simply a renewal of an existing tax that will support Opelika, Auburn and Lee County school systems.

The future is bright, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Our city council, department heads and city employees have worked tirelessly to bring positive improvements to you and our community. And in 2019, we plan to continue to work together for the greater good of all. We have challenged our department heads to be cooperative with one another and with the people we serve -- to be fair to everyone, to work as a team and to support the vision of our city leaders. It's not about who gets the credit, it's about the successes we accomplish together. And we know who's picking up the tab and who the "Boss" is.... that's you, the citizens of Opelika.

Thank you for joining me today and for allowing me to be your mayor. It's truly the best job I've ever had. Have a great 2019 and God Bless.