It is an honor and privilege to present my eleventh State of Cary address. This year we will be embarking on one of the most transformative periods in Cary’s history as we move into full gear with implementing your vision for Cary’s future – the Imagine Cary Community Plan. With only about 16 percent of greenfield developable land left in our borders, we will see more and more redevelopment proposals. It’s an exciting time and an opportunity to work together to make our premiere community even better.   
  
As of January 1, Cary’s population was about 162,000, which is a 1.79% increase in the past 12 months. We remain the 7th largest municipality in North Carolina.   
  
As we continue to grow and change, I’m proud to report that we also continue to be recognized nationally as one of the greatest places to live, work, play, and do business. Some of our accolades I’m particularly proud of from last year include one of the best places in the south to relocate your headquarters and best city for quality of life.   
  
It truly is a partnership to keep Cary great, and we’ve all played an important role.  
  
As for the role of your government, Cary remains very strong financially with AAA ratings from all major bond rating agencies. In addition, our General Fund balance remains about three times what is required by law, giving us flexibility to support those one-time community investments that help make Cary so special.  
  
Our tax rate continues to be the lowest in Wake County; however, I want to caution everyone that we continue to experience increasing pressure on our operating budget as the appetite for more and better from those we serve continues to grow. Your Council has empowered staff to seek efficiencies in process and investments in technology to ensure we get the highest value from every tax dollar we pay.  
  
Data tells us Cary’s economy remains strong. We have an unemployment rate of 3.6%. Last year we added more than 3,000 new jobs and more than $176 million in new capital investment. Based solely on official announcements, we expect at least 975 new jobs in Cary this year. That does not include jobs associated with a new 400,000 square foot building currently under construction on the SAS campus. There is a potential for more than 3,000 new jobs and over $240 million in new investment this year based on active interest.   
  
You should know, however, that maintaining and recruiting jobs in Cary is becoming more and more competitive. We can no longer afford to be perceived as a small town or a suburb If we want to keep Cary great. As we move forward we will have to be intentional, deliberate, and very, very strategic.   
  
To that end and to give our citizens and businesses every advantage in the increasingly competitive regional, national, and global marketplaces for securing the best jobs and opportunities today and for generations to come, Cary is undertaking its first major community branding initiative. This spring we will hire consultants to work with the Town’s Economic Development Committee to uncover Cary’s brand identity and formulate a compelling brand strategy that positions Cary for increased success.   
  
When I think of a place with an emerging and exciting identity, I can’t help but think of Downtown Cary.  
  
Our downtown took a major step forward in its revitalization this past year with the opening of Downtown Park’s square and several new businesses. Since its dedication last summer the downtown park square has seen a lot of activity. And it’s only going to get better as we kick-off the design process for the park site to complement the square.  
  
Across the street from the park is the historic Sams Jones House, which we recently leased to acclaimed chef Michael Chuong. Many of you will remember Michael as the Executive Chef of Prestonwood Country Club and later as the creative epicurean genius of An. We all look forward to being able to enjoy Michael’s food once again in Cary before the end of 2018.  
  
Thanks to new job opportunities like these, along with the Imagine Cary vision, residential development and redevelopers are also showing lots of interest in downtown. Chatham Walk, East Chatham condos and East Park Street townhomes are approved or are currently in pre-sales. The Jordan development at Harrison Avenue and Chatham Street that includes 75,000 square feet of office and retail, 188 apartments, and a parking deck is expected to come before the Council in a public hearing this spring.   
  
As you can see, downtown Cary is transforming and will continue to change in the coming years. Of course, change is often accompanied by challenge, with one of our more notable ones being stormwater. However, I’m happy to report to you that we are getting on top of this. Our incredible Cary staff has fully engaged with citizens, developers, academicians, engineers and even the federal government – all the best minds – to create the most extensive and effective stormwater management program ever. That’s what we’re going to have to do to redevelope and revitalize moving forward. And it’s going to have to be based on partnerships in ways we’ve never seen before. Making Cary resilient is going to be complicated, expensive hard work. But I am confident that we will do it because we have to do it.  
  
Another piece of great news for Cary is our Eastern Gateway. This year we’ve seen two large proposals that, once built, will have a tremendous impact on not only Cary but our entire region. Phase 1 of the Cary Towne Center mall redevelopment zoning was approved for an IKEA, which is estimated to open in 2020. The mall’s second phase of redevelopment, which will be a mix of uses, is currently under staff review and should have a Council public hearing later this year.   
  
Across the street is the proposed Columbia development site. This would be a large, mixed-use development anchored by a Wegman’s – Cary’s second. Called the Fenton, it includes a vertical and horizontal mix of retail, office and residential.   
  
While development proposals in our downtown and the Eastern Gateway are getting a lot of attention, development west of highway 55 is also very active. Currently there are 65 development plans approved for 2,235 lots, 851 multi-family units, and about 799,000 square feet of non-residential. There are also several transportation projects underway to help support that development.   
  
Another major project scheduled for this year that I want to highlight is the Cary Parkway and High House intersection Improvement. We’ll be adding turn lanes to get more of you through the intersection faster, and we’ll be preserving the look and feel of what I think is one of the most attractive areas in Cary.  
  
Looking ahead for this year, expect plenty more park improvements and greenway openings including Carpenter Park community garden. We will also see the completion of the Kids Together Playground Misting Garden, the American Tobacco Trail and Yates Store Road pedestrian tunnel, and restrooms at MacDonald Woods Park. Major greenway connections will be made with the completion of the White Oak Creek Greenway and the Crabtree Creek Greenway.  
  
I would like to close this year’s address by talking about two topics I care deeply about. The first is our local struggle with the opioid crisis. Just as most places in our nation, this is a growing problem in Cary. Last year we saw a 40% increase in fatal overdoses and a 135% increase in non-fatal overdoses, resulting in a 70% overall increase in overdoses. Today, all our patrol officers carry Narcan, which has prevented overdose deaths of our Cary friends and family members. Additionally, Cary has submitted an application for a Mayors Challenge Grant. This program, administered by the Michael Bloomberg Philanthropies, will select 35 “champion” cities and award each up to $100,000 to implement a pilot of the program defined in their submittal. Later this year, Bloomberg Philanthropies will award four $1 million grants and one $5 million grant to fully implement their programs. With or without these grants we will continue to look for ways to battle this crisis.  
  
My second and final topic is the divisiveness in our state and country. In this State of Cary address, I’ve been able to show all that we can accomplish when we work together regardless of party or ideology. I am so proud of and thankful for that. You see, I believe that it is only through mutual understanding and respect that people can reach their true and full potential. I am very blessed to work with a Council that joins me in this belief and has practiced this over the years. This shared belief, along with our incredible staff and amazing Chamber, has resulted in one of the greatest places to live, work, play, raise a family and run a business in America.   
  
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 2018.