I am honored to be here with all of you today.  As I was preparing my remarks, I realized that this opportunity to speak came about due to the sacrifices of others — sacrifices that have been made since the very beginning of our nation.  The recent tragic loss of two Navy aviators was a painful reminder that there is no greater sacrifice than to lose one's life in service to one's community and nation.

Please join me for a moment of silent prayer to honor NAS Oceana's Lieutenant Commander James Brice Johnson, and Lieutenant Caleb Nathaniel King, who died two weeks ago off the coast of Key West.

Thank you.

Today, we are fortunate to have with us members of the United States Armed Forces.  Please stand when I call your name.... Admiral Phil Davidson, Commander of U.S. Fleet Forces; Captain Joey Frantzen, Commander of Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story; and Captain Chad VinceLET, a Virginia Beach native who was recently installed as Commander of Naval Air Station Oceana... and now all military members — both active and veterans — please stand and let us salute you.

Let us also salute the local superheroes, the men and women who keep Virginia Beach safe and sound.  All members of our public safety and criminal justice teams, including police, fire, EMS, 9-1-1 the Sheriff's Office,  the courts system and  the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office — please stand and let us thank you for all you do to keep us safe. 

In a world that seems so divided — WE are united.    This patriotic spirit extends throughout our region … and unites us as Americans.  It's a big part of what makes our community so special.

It's hard to believe, but I was first elected to the [Virginia Beach City Council](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/city-clerk/city-council/Pages/default.aspx) 30 years ago.  And as mayor, this is my 10th State of the City speech.  I may have aged just a bit, but the honor of representing Virginia Beach and all of its accomplishments never gets old.  I have the privilege of working with a talented City Council that's been a big part of the great success in this city.  Would all members of the Virginia Beach City Council please stand and let us applaud you.

Many in this room have been with me on this journey all these years, while others are relatively new to this city.  It has always been a point of pride for me to know that, whether you're a Virginia Beach native — or you got here as soon as you could… when you live in Virginia Beach, it doesn't take long to realize you're in the greatest city in the world.

94 percent of respondents to our 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Survey say they're satisfied with living here.  I challenge you to find another city with ratings that high.  In fact, Virginia Beach was ranked the number one big city to live in last year, outpacing the second-best big city — Seattle — by a full percentage point.

What goes into making a great city?  What sets Virginia Beach apart from the rest?

Let's start with a high-performing public school system.... 100 percent of all 82 testing Virginia Beach City Public Schools earned full Standards of Learning accreditation for this school year.  About the honor, Superintendent Aaron Spence said, and I quote, "Accreditation is the base, and our goal is to build upon that base and continue to meet the needs of every student every day," end quote.

An Achievable Dream Academy is a great example.  This groundbreaking public-private program is now entering its sixth year, and is now the sole emphasis at Seatack Elementary School.  With strong support from community partners, the military, and mentors, this year-round, extended-day program will expand into middle school education starting in July.  Will Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence, the members of the School Board, Principal Vince Darby, Director of Operations Chris Middleton, and most importantly, the students of An Achievable Dream Academy please stand and let us recognize you?

Another element of a great city is safe neighborhoods....  Police officers and residents in every neighborhood of our city have built solid relationships, and crime in Virginia Beach is as low as it was in 1963 when a gallon of gas was 29 cents, the average annual income was $5,807 dollars, and Beatlemania was all the rage... and Virginia Beach and Princess Anne County merged to become the City of Virginia Beach.  Today, close to 90 percent of residents believe that Virginia Beach is a safe place to live, and that speaks volumes about the work being done throughout our criminal justice system and the community.

A third element of a great city is volunteerism....  Virginia Beach has an army of people who give of their time, talent and hearts every year.  People like Susan Bauman, a retired realtor and loan officer who serves as a paramedic, secretary and scheduler for the Virginia Beach Volunteer Rescue Squad... and Beach Fellowship Pastor Ray Bjorkman, who chairs VB Home NOW, the organization that has raised more than $385,000 dollars to support our efforts to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring. These are just two examples of the more than 14,000 volunteers who last year donated more than one million hours valued at $28 million dollars.

For all these reasons and more, Virginia Beach is attracting millennials — the largest generation of the U.S. workforce.  Millennials pick a place they want to live.... and then they get a job.  Good thing we're growing start-ups and we're adding jobs, because these young people are picking Virginia Beach.  Nearly a quarter of all households in Virginia Beach are headed by a millennial — more than anywhere else in Virginia.

Last year alone, Virginia Beach added more than 2,500 new jobs – that's a thousand more than the year before — representing a private capital investment of $235 million dollars, which was nearly $60 million dollars more than the previous year.  As stated in this month's issue of "Virginia Business" magazine, 5 out of the top 10 economic development deals in Coastal Virginia occurred in Virginia Beach.  Great job growth is another hallmark of a great city.

Some people believe that Virginia Beach focuses only on the big deals, but that couldn't be further from the truth.  Small businesses represent the largest part of the business tax base, and a key provider of jobs.  Last year, 20 economic development incentive grants were awarded, and 12 went to small or SWaM-certified businesses.

The entrepreneurs, the innovators and the dreamers among us are strengthening our city, creating jobs and spurring economic growth. As a result, we are continuing to nurture existing businesses and successfully growing diverse economic clusters to compete for 21st century jobs in key areas of advanced manufacturing, technology and bioscience.

In manufacturing, much of this growth is coming from small businesses with big ideas, and it is especially gratifying to see our military veterans launching some of these new ventures like Matbock and S&S Precision.  Both are manufacturing companies with veterans at the helm.

Just last summer, we cut the ribbon at U-Play USA, a Chinese corporation that opened its first North American manufacturing operation in Virginia Beach, investing $4.9 million dollars and creating 35 new jobs.  More than 20 overseas companies now operate their U.S. or North American headquarters in Virginia Beach.

In the area of technology, Virginia Beach is experiencing transformative growth....  At last year's State of the City event, I talked about the two fastest subsea cables in the world.  Today, I'm pleased to tell you that both have made their way to our shore.  The first is MAREA, the result of a partnership between Microsoft, Facebook and Telxius.  This cable connects Virginia Beach to Spain and provides bandwidth so fast that it can stream 71 million high-definition videos at the same time.

I was honored to be part of the announcement in Williamsburg last September when [Microsoft President Brad Smith](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=DMn1yjswGwQ) said, and I quote, "this is part of the infrastructure of the 21st century" — "a connection that will bring the next billion users of the internet closer to those of us who live in the United States," end quote.  I'm glad that those internet users will be navigating right through Virginia Beach.

The second cable is BRUSA, which connects Virginia Beach to Brazil, and is owned by Telxius, which will use the cable to serve its expanding global network.

Since my announcement last year of the NextVN Data Center Park, we have learned that six additional subsea cables are planning to land in Virginia Beach.  These cables will connect Virginia Beach to Africa, the Caribbean, and Continental Europe.

Altogether, this new high-tech infrastructure makes Virginia Beach a Digital Port City, with top-tier levels of connectivity to support large-scale data center developments.  Every company with big data needs, including financial services and bio-medical, relies on access to a fast and secure digital infrastructure to meet the demands of their customers.  We are meeting these ever-growing demands and connecting Virginia Beach to the world in ways that few other cities can.  Virginia Beach can now deliver — we are "on the map."

The City of Virginia Beach is also investing in the creation of a local Next Generation Broadband Network to more effectively move data around the city and region, connecting municipal facilities and schools and providing access to private internet service providers to support their services to customers.

It's great to see a homegrown company like Globalinx Data Center LLC, jumping on the opportunity to purchase 10 acres near the cable landing station in the Corporate Landing Business Park to develop a 138,000-square-foot international, carrier-neutral data center.

Another technology firm, Bcause LLC, is also expanding, and moving its headquarters to a new location on Greenwich Road.  This company mines bitcoins — the latest form of digital currency — and plans to add 100 new full-time jobs with average annual salaries of $60,000 dollars.

This year, Business Facilities magazine identified Virginia Beach-based Global Technical Systems as one of this year's major economic development announcements.  GTS is changing how the world manages energy resources — investing $55 million dollars and creating 1,100 new jobs with average annual salaries of $74,000 dollars, to manufacture 100 percent environmentally friendly energy storage systems.  Even before breaking ground, the company has increased its footprint by an additional 100,000 square feet.

In a different but equally important area of innovation is our need to harness alternative sources of energy.  In fact, during my very first State of the City address in 2009, I established a commission to evaluate opportunities in this area.  We are excited to see progress on our doorstep with offshore wind.  Next year, Dominion Energy and its new partner, Orsted, will break ground to build wind turbines off the coast of Virginia Beach.  This is a tremendous opportunity for our city, Coastal Virginia and beyond.

New growth is also happening at Virginia Beach's larger, more established companies.

GEICO hired 500 more people last year, and this "Best of the Beach" employer plans to fill another 500 positions this year.

[STIHL](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.yesvirginiabeach.com/media/pages/article.aspx?release=282) is expanding, too.  The U.S. headquarters currently occupies more than one million square feet of industrial space on 150 acres in the Lynnhaven corridor.  With an investment in excess of $25 million, this powerhouse manufacturer is building a state-of-the-art, 80,000-square-foot administration facility.  In fact, the groundbreaking ceremony is tomorrow.  Thanks to Bjoern Fischer and all the people at STIHL for your sustained confidence in Virginia Beach.

Bioscience is another sector that has taken root.... And Virginia Beach is emerging as a vibrant epicenter of bio-technology, bio-medical and health care activity.

LifeNet Health has been leading the way since 1982 and this global leader is expanding its footprint here again — adding another 321 jobs and three more locations.

The momentum of our VABeachBio initiative is building.  The Center for Advancing Innovation and the City of Virginia Beach are teaming up on the VABeachBio Innovation Challenge, the first-of-its-kind to focus on building the biomedical ecosystem in one community.  This challenge has the potential to create as many as 2,000 knowledge-based jobs and 26 veteran-led startups.

Today, I'm excited to announce that Olympia Development has been selected to partner with the City on the first building to be constructed at the 155-acre VABeachBio Innovation Park.  The state-of-the-art 60,000-square-foot R&D facility will offer much needed wet-lab space.

Just down the road from the Innovation Park, a new 128-bed State Veterans Care Center is being built on donated City land.  Today, it's my privilege to announce even more healthcare services for military families.  A 10,000-square-foot mental health clinic has selected Virginia Beach for its newest location.  The Cohen Veterans Network will serve up to 600 post-9/11 veterans and their families a year with up to 20 employees.

Once the doors open at these two facilities, Coastal Virginia veterans and their families will have MUCH greater and more convenient access to the care they deserve and have earned.

Last June, I was happy to cut the ribbon at Bon Secours Town Center, now offering physical therapy and sports performance services.  It's in a two-story, 25,000-square-foot medical plaza that used to be retail space.  And Sentara Healthcare is investing more than $80 million dollars in Virginia Beach to renovate and modernize Virginia Beach General Hospital and expand Princess Anne Hospital.

**The Virginia Beach we know today is the product of planning, perseverance and political courage.** We're on a roll, not because of luck, but because seeds that were planted and cultivated years ago, and tended carefully, are bearing fruit.  To continue being the greatest city in the world, we must constantly nourish our roots, build this city on solid ground and not yield to a handful of vocal naysayers who seem intent on stopping our progress.

The amazing quality of life that Virginia Beach residents enjoy today is due to people working together to create the best possible future for the next generations.  I ran for City Council 30 years ago because I saw the vast potential of our city and I wanted to work with others to realize that potential.  We got busy.  We began thinking about what we needed to become a world-class city.  We crafted a bold and daring vision that rallied support around projects and industries that would pay off for the City and our residents.

We started with the world's largest service sector industry — tourism.

In 2016, we hosted more than [15 million visitors](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/cvb/Documents/20180207-CVB-RM-212-2018 Quick Facts_DIAZ Tourism.pdf) who infused $1.49 billion dollars into the local economy by direct travel-related expenditures.  Visitors to Virginia Beach contribute almost $60 million dollars to the City's General Fund….  That amounts to about 10 cents on the dollar of our property tax rate.   State and local tax revenue topped $132 million dollars, and tourism supports more than 13,000 local jobs.

Like the people who live here, visitors need places to go and things to do.  We introduced entertainment in the resort area, and we revitalized our boardwalk.  We widened our beaches.  We built the amphitheater, the convention center, the Virginia Aquarium and the Sandler Center.  Each of these projects has added to our own quality of life, to the attractions visitors enjoy, and to our bottom line.  Win – win – win.

Achieving this success has not been easy, because with every big project, we had to figure out the answer to one very important question: How are we going to pay for this… while at the same time maintaining the lowest real estate taxes in the region?

I'll tell you how we did it…. We tipped the scales in our favor by establishing a fund in 1993 to develop and maintain our tourism investments.  Today, we call it the Tourism Investment Program — "TIP" for short.  We collect dedicated revenues for oceanfront entertainment events, and for construction and debt costs surrounding projects like this Convention Center.  All this, while paying the lowest real estate taxes in the region... because these projects generate revenue that benefits our General Fund and helps pay for everyday City services like schools, police, fire, EMS, libraries, rec centers, parks, road construction and other public amenities.

And now, we MUST step up our game to continue to be a player in the extremely competitive world of tourism. We're ready for the next level — as a year-round destination.  I'm here to tell you — it's within our reach, and our plans are coming together. Today, Virginia Beach is competing nationally and globally.  And we're in it to win it!

The Central Beach Entertainment District will transform our resort area — providing an experience that's relevant, authentic and fun.  There's already buzz about it...  A recent article in the online travel guide, "[Thrillist Travel](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/urban-renewal-projects-2018-american-cities/travel)," tells readers to, and I quote, "Look for Virginia Beach within a few years to be considered a primo American beach destination, a jewel on one of the country's most underrated stretches of coast," end quote.  Underrated?  Not for long!

Check this out....

[THE WAVE VIDEO]

We're going for the gold on this one....  A world-class surf park where USA Surfing can train for the Olympics, and for Virginia Beach to host competitions all year round.

The Wave will be an anchor for the 19th Street Improvement Project, which will create a scenic streetscape where pedestrians will enjoy a stroll through the ViBe District to the Convention Center and a brand new, top-notch Sports Center — paid for with TIP funds — that will pack 'em in year-round.

This multi-million-dollar indoor facility will generate more than 60 new events a year, and stimulate $9.7 million dollars in annual economic activity.  Think about it.... Families would come to Virginia Beach for a tournament and stay a few extra days on vacation.

Here's the first public look at this magnificent facility.  We're going for the gold on this one, too....  Birmingham, Alabama currently hosts the NCAA Track and Field indoor competitions at a facility that's sort of in the middle of nowhere.  Well, Virginia Beach can do better, and we've set our sights on bringing those athletes to compete in a spanking new facility that will be built right across the street from this convention center.  It will have approximately 250,000 square feet, with an indoor articulated track, and seating for at least 5,000 spectators, along with 12 high school regulation basketball courts convertible to 24 volleyball courts, and space for wrestling and cheerleading competitions.

We also anticipate receiving bids to lease City-owned land on May 14th for a concrete public pier project that brings private investments in an oceanfront plaza, a hotel, shops, restaurants and parking.

Speaking of parking, we have a strategy that identifies seven distinct districts in the Resort Area — from North Beach to Rudee Loop and the Marina.  The proposed budget City Manager Dave Hansen introduced yesterday includes $55 million for parking in the Central Beach and Convention Center districts that could add around 2,300 structured and 1,000 surface parking spaces.

Folks, each of these projects will be paid for using TIP fund revenues, which has proven to be an enormously successful financing tool in building our tourism portfolio.  But innovative cities continue to look for ways to maximize the public investment and the return on that investment.  When we started using public-private partnerships 30 years ago, Virginia Beach was out in front as an innovator in the area of public financing.  And the truth is, they are still often sorely misunderstood, which is why we hear a lot of misinformation about them.  That's one thing….. [Miz Information cuts in…..]

[[STATIC ON THE VIDEO SCREEN AND MIZ INFORMATION FADES IN]](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://youtu.be/LdGFphVz_-M)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Miz Information | Well, hello there, Mayor Sessoms. Did I hear you call my name? |
| Mayor | Sort of, but you're also interrupting an event here. |
| Miz Information | I am?  Well, actually, I knew that. Because I'm Miz Information, the know-it-all at City Hall.  And I thought you could use a hand with this whole public-private-partnership thing.  How about if I give you — and all of those good-looking people out there — a few examples of awesome partnerships AND the return on investment they've provided to Virginia Beach? |
| Mayor | Okay, Miz Info, you're on — let's hear it. |
| Miz Information | I can do better than that. I'll show you. (Hits keyboard, goes to b-roll). Have you seen the newly reopened Cavalier on the Hill? It's truly magnificent, the crown jewel of a larger $235 million dollar project that includes hotels and residential development. We will recover the City's investment and receive an estimated $65 million dollars in revenue over the next 20 years.  The 31st Street project was a $31.7 million dollar public investment in a park, restrooms and a parking garage that leveraged a $41.5 million dollar private investment.  From that, the City receives more than $4 million dollars each year.  And just look at all of the surrounding development that has occurred since. This project was a catalyst for revitalizing the whole area.  Can you believe Town Center is 15 years old? The total private investment in all phases of the development is $487 million dollars.  The public investment is $108 million — that's a 4.5 to 1 ratio.  The latest phase alone has a private to public investment ratio of 10 to 1 — $48 million dollars of private investment and $3.9 million in public funds.  There will be a second level public plaza, Zeiders American Dream Theatre, apartments and more.  In 1996, the City invested $10.5 million dollars in the Virginia Beach Amphitheater, and a private partner spent $7 million dollars. During the first 20 years, close to six million patrons have attended about 600 events there.  Since it opened, the City has earned its investment back more than twice over.  We also have partnerships with Foundations, and those have resulted in some exciting additions to our community.  For example, $12.5 million dollars was raised from private donations to help build the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts and the Virginia Aquarium Foundation has raised millions toward exhibits and construction costs.  For instance, the Foundation contributed $9 million dollars to create the popular Restless Planet exhibit and $5 million dollars to expand the Aquarium in 1996.  And there you have it — just a few examples of big ideas with big returns.  You know, Mayor, I could…. do the rest of this speech for you if you'd like… I'm rather enjoying the spotlight.... Are they getting my best side? |

I think I got it from here, thanks.  Please give HER a hand.

Friends, it's time we start to FIGHT BACK against the intentional spread of MISinformation about these great projects... and about our successes.  Please... help us get the truth out.

Here's the bottom line with these partnerships, folks….  Every public-private partnership must achieve a positive result that neither the City nor its private partner could accomplish acting alone.  For example, the City receives more than $8 million dollars a year on non-real estate taxes generated from Town Center.  This income is added to the General Fund and helps reduce the amount taxpayers have to spend on services.

So whenever you hear someone say the investments we make in projects only benefit developers, or hoteliers, or tourists… set 'em straight: these are investments that benefit residents in real and tangible ways.  Not only do they result in higher quality projects, but they pay dividends by reducing the tax burden on businesses and homeowners.  That's one of the reasons why Virginia Beach has the lowest real estate tax rate and the highest quality of life in the region.

Without a doubt, investment partnerships have contributed to the quality of life that we enjoy today, and we are well on our way to a more prosperous future.  We must not lose sight of the things we should celebrate, that make us proud of our city and the people who make it great.

For example, in July, we celebrated the designation of Virginia Beach Boulevard in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  That same day, more than a thousand people witnessed the moving dedication of the Navy SEAL Monument depicting "The Naked Warrior."  In November, the Virginia Beach Vietnam Veterans 50th Anniversary Commemoration was held right here in this ballroom and recognized the great sacrifices and heroism of so many of our local veterans and their families.

A great city looks to the future… and preserves the past.  The historic Cavalier on the Hill has finally been restored to glory.  If you haven't been there yet, I encourage you to visit.  It is nothing short of spectacular.  Bruce Thompson and the Cavalier Associates have not overlooked a single detail and the result is the return of the crown jewel of our city.

And let's not forget that Bruce was the impetus behind the Grommet Island Playground, and the 70-acre Camp Grom.  Finally, wounded veterans, families of the fallen, and adults and children with disabilities or special needs will have a place to call their own at this one-of-its kind camp on the East Coast.  Thanks, Bruce, for partnering with the City, the Virginia Gentlemen Foundation, and many other organizations to make this happen.

We are also fortunate to be able to celebrate major contributions from our institutions of higher learning.

I'd like to congratulate Tidewater Community College on its anniversary.  50 years ago, it began educating students in Portsmouth.  Five years later in 1973, the Virginia Beach campus was established.

Regent University launched a new Cybersecurity Institute with a state-of-the-art cyber range that simulates large-scale virtual networks that are under attack, and Norfolk State University is also a key supporter of our cybersecurity industry sector.  There is no more important or growing field than finding ways to keep us safe in cyberspace.

Virginia Wesleyan has a new name and a new address.  It is now officially Virginia Wesleyan University located right here in Virginia Beach.  The new state-of-the-art Greer Environmental Sciences Center earned V-W-U the top national award from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation as "National Conservationist of the Year."

Hampton University has provided invaluable assistance as we expand our small business programs, in addition to being a key investor in Virginia Beach.

 Not to be outdone, I'm delighted to announce that Old Dominion University will renovate the Virginia Beach Higher Education Center to offer new, high-demand graduate programs in the health sciences.  These programs will focus on emerging technologies and will reduce the persistent critical shortage of health care providers in Virginia.

Starting this year, Old Dominion's Virginia Beach Higher Education Center will offer upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in nursing and in telehealth training.  In the future, ODU plans to launch the School of Public Health and open a clinic to provide primary care, physical therapy and speech therapy, along with three other health-related centers.

Virginia Beach is becoming a higher education powerhouse!  Please join me in giving ODU President John Broderick; Hampton University President William Harvey; Norfolk State University Interim President Melvin Stith; Regent University CEO Pat Robertson; TCC President Edna Baehre-Kolovani; and Virginia Wesleyan President Scott Miller; a round of applause for their success in preparing students for meaningful and rewarding careers.

There's no place like home, and it's good to see so many new apartment-homes sprouting up across Virginia Beach.  In fact, more than 800 new units valued at more than $85 million dollars were added last year.  And here's just a sample of what's coming.... The Franklin Johnston Group is currently developing the Standard 200 Apartments on 10 acres near Witchduck Road, and Coastal 61 at Oxford Village near Virginia Wesleyan University.  In a partnership with Samaritan House, The Lawson Companies will open Seaside Harbor Apartments this July, providing affordable housing in the ViBe Creative District.

People needing overnight accommodations can also look forward to new hotels.  Coastal Hospitality is developing a Residence Inn by Marriott at Convergence Center near Town Center.  Harmony Hospitality is developing a Home2 Suites by Hilton on City property adjacent to TCC.  And, right across the street from the Cavalier, a new $125 million dollar Marriott is under construction as part of that development.

I'm especially proud that our City's $27 million dollar Housing Resource Center will open this summer, and provide new opportunities for homeless families and individuals to put down roots.  I have to give a shout-out to the employees of Charles Barker Automotive who recently pledged, through the Champions for Kids foundation, $250,000 dollars to the HRC.

And the City of Virginia Beach continues to fund projects that enhance the timely movement of people, goods and services.  The FY2019 CIP includes more than $300 million dollars over the six-year planning period for construction of several large roadway projects that will ease congestion and improve travel times.  These include improvements to Laskin Road, First Colonial Road, Shore Drive, and Elbow Road.  And the new Lesner Bridge will open this summer.

We have lots of great news and progress to celebrate, but I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the challenges, as well….

Two come to mind.  Our efforts to bring a privately funded, world-class arena to Virginia Beach didn't pan out, and neither did our bid to bring Amazon's Headquarters #2.  But I have no regrets about aggressively pursuing either one.  In words attributed to hockey Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky, quote, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take," end quote. We may not win them all, but we're going to stay in the game… and we will continue to compete every day — globally — to build upon our strengths as a community.

It's these strengths that enable us to tackle the tough issues that impact the lives and livelihoods of our residents and business owners. Let me highlight just four.

First – The [Virginia Beach City Council](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/city-clerk/city-council/Pages/default.aspx) is absolutely committed to protecting our community from sea level rise and repetitive flooding by reducing our risk and increasing our resiliency.  To address stormwater infrastructure needs, sea level rise and repetitive flooding, Virginia Beach has already committed more than $321 million dollars for this top priority. That's two times more than our neighboring Southside localities combined.

Second – A full [disparity study](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/finance/Pages/DisparityStudy.aspx) is underway to analyze the City's efforts to encourage the participation of minority-, woman-, and veteran-owned businesses in municipal contracting… and determine what improvements are needed to optimize our processes.  I'm eager to hear the findings later this year.

Third – Sadly, [opioid addiction](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/human-services/behavioral-health/Pages/Opioid-Prevention-Treatment-Recovery.aspx) is claiming lives across America… and right here in our city.  Our Department of Human Services and public safety agencies are working diligently to help sufferers and their families get out from under that beast, and they are armed with Narcan, a prescription medication that's saving the lives of overdose victims.  But we must do more.  So today, I'm announcing that Virginia Beach is filing a lawsuit against opioid manufacturers, because we must stop this epidemic dead in its tracks.

Fourth – Another major issue impacts our commerce, our tourism and our families.  We must make air travel in-and-out of Coastal Virginia affordable and more direct, and today, I'm announcing the establishment of a task force chaired by Tommy Johnson of Willcox Savage and vice-chaired by Bobby Beasley of Harvey Lindsay, to evaluate air service in Coastal Virginia.  This is a perfect project where regional cooperation can benefit us all.  It's time to see where the Norfolk, Newport News and Richmond airports can work together, because they can no longer afford to compete against one another.

These are tough issues — but we're tougher.  And we'll tackle these just like we have addressed all of the other challenges we've faced. New technologies and diverse work styles are changing the landscape of the labor force, and the millennial generation is critical to our future success.

I often ask myself: What must we do NOW to make sure Virginia Beach is a place where young people want to live?  I knew just who to ask.  I recently had the opportunity to chat with some of our younger citizens to find out what they think about our City and its future.  Take a listen to what they had to say….

["Next Generations" Video](https://www.vbgov.com/government/departments/communications-office/state-of-the-city/Pages/2018-state-of-the-city.aspxhttps://youtu.be/fpyK3SaYhI4)

Pretty insightful comments, don't you think?

We certainly have our work cut out for us.  Yet it's clear that in Virginia Beach, we have everything we need to forge a bright future.

I'm just as excited to be a part of growing Virginia Beach now as I was during my first year on Council...  Back then, Bev and I had just welcomed our youngest daughter into the world.  Today — 30 years later, we have four beautiful grandchildren.  Lucy, the newest Sessoms grandchild and our daughter Kate's first child, was born less than a month ago.

Each new life, whether it's in my family or yours, should drive us all to connect our children and our city to the best possible future.  It's an honor to serve as your Mayor, and I couldn't do it without the support of my whole family, starting with, of course, my wonderful wife, Bev; our three daughters, Mollie, Kate and Anne Douglas, and my sons-in-law, Kyle, Fred and Chad; our grandchildren, Madie, Willie, Walker and Lucy; my Mother; and my sister, Barbara and her husband, Jeff.  Thank you, Family!

I'd also like to thank the Hampton Roads Chamber for giving me this opportunity, and for always being proactive in moving our city and Coastal Virginia forward.

Without a doubt — Virginia Beach IS a special place, deserving of its spot at the top of the list of best places to live.  We have passionate and diverse citizens who care about our community.  We have safe neighborhoods, clean streets and schools that go above and beyond for our children.  We have wonderful parks, recreation centers and libraries.  We are growing our economy, rebuilding our infrastructure, supporting the creation of 21st century jobs and taking care of each other.  All of that, and an ocean, too.  People who live here love the life… so it's easy to see why others visit to live the life.

Since we became a city some 55 short years ago, Virginia Beach has come a long, long way.  What will the next 55 years bring?  The seeds of that future are being planted today.

We have always set our sights high so the next generations are better off.  We must continue to dream and plan and, yes, sometimes even fight for, what is right for Virginia Beach to keep it…. the best city in which to live, and the greatest city in the world.

Thank you. ​