

Good morning Cobb County and Happy New Year!

Thank you Ben
for such a meaningful and sincere introduction.

You are true friend
and a positive force in the Cobb Community.

Dr. Mathews- Thank you as well
for a very inspirational invocation.

I appreciate having you as my pastor and friend
At First United Methodist Church.

2015 was an incredibly successful year
and we have so much to talk about today.

But before we start
I want to recognize some people in the room
Who, with out, the success Cobb experienced last year
Would not have been possible.

First and most importantly, my wife - Annette.
As most of you in the room know
Annette is a remarkable woman.

She is my support, my encouragement
and my reality check.
I am so grateful to her for being my partner in life,
and for being here today.
Annette, please stand and be recognized.

In spite of what you may hear,
the Board of Commissioners
agree on a lot more
than we don't.

The truth is, Cobb is served well
to have 5 independent voices on the Board of Commissioners

In fact, it's our individual strengths
that make us a strong board collectively
and therefore, even in our disagreements,
Cobb is better

because we are a very strong Board **together**,
and today you will hear all that
we have accomplished
together
for Cobb County in 2015

Commissioners, please stand...

Commissioner JoAnn Birrell
Lisa Cupid
Bob Ott
Bob Weatherford

Please welcome, Mr. David Hankerson,
Our County Manager.
His Agency Directors, Department Heads and Staff...

Thank you to the team in the Office of the Chairman,
Kellie Brownlow and Charlotte Collins
who help keep my office running so smoothly day after day

Thank you to the State Legislators
who are able to join us today.
We look forward to working with you this upcoming session.

There are also many City elected officials, Constitutional officers, judges and representatives of
the Sheriff's office here
Thank you for being here.

Your ongoing support and collaborative efforts
help Cobb County to continue to strive for excellence.
And be recognized as the best in class.

I would be remiss if
I did not thank
the residents of Cobb County...
It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your Chairman.

Despite its challenges,
this job is extremely rewarding
and I am grateful and thankful
to YOU
for giving ME this opportunity.

Thank you to the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce
for hosting
the State of Cobb County.
and

Thank you to Georgia Power for
For sponsoring today's breakfast
and for always being such a great partner
in our community

As I began to prepare my remarks for this morning
I couldn't help but reflect on the past 5 years
that I have been Chairman of Cobb County
And how much has changed since my first
State of the County address.

In January 2011, I stood before you
in one of the worst economic times
in many of our lives

We on the Board of Commissioners, because of the recession,
faced some of the toughest decisions
in Cobb County history.

Even after cutting as many positions as possible,
we were then forced to cut services
and raise the property tax millage rate
in order to balance our budget.

Those were the toughest choices I have had to make
In my 14 years on the Cobb Commission
These times required hard decisions and decisive leadership.

We didn't know it then, but
Doing the right thing to maintain Cobb's strong financial health
Put the County in the position
Of making the boldest decision in our modern history

I am **proud** to stand here today
just 5 short years later
to report to you that
the State of Cobb County is **STRONG**
and getting stronger

Cobb County has the lowest taxes

The most robust economic growth
And is the most fiscally conservative
Of any of the core counties in the region

Within 5 years
We have restored the millage rate on property taxes
to pre-recession levels
All the while making tremendous investments in public safety

AND embarking on one of the most significant public private partnerships in the history of Cobb
County

2015 was a year of growth, investment and opportunity.
Because of the halo effect of SunTrust Park,
Cobb is experiencing economic growth
At a **record** pace

Together, this Board of Commissioners has worked tirelessly
To keep our county prosperous
Financially conservative,
safe everywhere for everyone,
and poised for an even brighter future.

Cobb County's tax digest,
which is a reflection of property values across Cobb County
is growing
But not quite to pre-recession levels.

Cobb's fiscally conservative financial policies
Continue to be recognized by Wall Street

For the 19th consecutive year,
Cobb County earned a Triple AAA bond rating
from each of the 3 major rating agencies

Cobb is one of fewer than 44 counties
in the United States
to hold this prestigious rating

I want to take a moment
to recognize Cobb's Chief Financial Officer, Jim Pehrson
Jim, please stand up
Jim is without a doubt
one of the most respected experts

on budgeting and financial management
in the State of Georgia.

In fact, his expertise has been sought
by governments across the country

And we in Cobb County are fortunate to have his leadership

Thank you Jim

One of the wisest investments
a local government can make with its resources
is in public safety.

Before I talk more about Cobb County's investment in public safety,
I want to recognize and thank
every single first responder in Cobb County.

Public safety is paramount in every community
and make no mistake about it...
the men and women
who risk their lives every day to protect ours
are the true heroes of Cobb County

It is because of the courage and commitment
of these men and women
that the Board of Commissioners
made a \$196 million investment in Public Safety.

This includes new resources that will
help put 80 additional officers on the street
and help ensure that Cobb
has the recruitment and retention policies in place
to attract and retain
the best and brightest
in the public safety business.

Infrastructure is another wise investment
in the future of Cobb.
The SPLOST program is Cobb County's primary financing tool
for infrastructure improvement

2015 marked the end of
a very successful 4 year SPLOST...

that allowed Cobb County to invest almost \$500 million dollars in major upgrades and renovations at dozens of parks, recreational and cultural facilities across the entire county.

This SPLOST made possible key infrastructure and capital projects Including The Skipp Spann Connector... The Windy Hill Diverging Diamond Interchange... Major operational and pedestrian improvements on Six Flags Drive... And much needed safety enhancements on Cobb Parkway at Mars Hill Rd.

Thanks to the 2011 SPLOST Cobb County is now the home of an international airport.

In 2015, our airport opened a new customs facility, began accepting international flights, and unveiled a new, world class air traffic control tower

A tool for attracting and retaining major corporations. The Cobb International Airport is positioning itself to be one of the most corporate friendly facilities in the Southeast

Now, I'd like to talk about investment the private sector has made in Cobb County.

In 2015 alone, private companies invested more than \$300 million in Cobb.

Since I have been Chairman, there has been more than \$2 billion of private investment in our community.

Cobb County is Bucking the Trend!

Our economic growth is unprecedented While companies and jobs are moving from the suburbs to the urban core in most parts of the country The opposite is happening here in Cobb

Let me explain just how we are bucking that trend...

Last year, more than 4,500 jobs
were created or retained in Cobb County.

Five new Class A Office Towers are moving forward in the Galleria area

This is the first time an office tower has been constructed
in Cobb County in more than 10 years!

Cobb County's unemployment rate is 5 percent
This is the lowest unemployment rate we have seen since 2008!

Tourism remains the largest economic driver in Cobb County
generating more than \$2.75 billion annually

This is a 7 percent increase over the previous year
and it is expected to continue to do better and better

The Kennesaw State University Owls
kicked off their inaugural season in 2015,
bringing thousands of tourists and visitors
to our great County for each of their home games.

Speaking of sports...
Cobb County began 2015
as the future home of one professional sports team,
We ended 2015
as the home of THREE professional sports teams.

The Atlanta Blaze- a Major League Lacrosse team
that will play at KSU
and the Atlanta United Football Club,
a Major League Soccer team
both announced Cobb County as their new home.

I can't talk about professional sports teams,
calling Cobb County Home,
without talking about the Atlanta Braves!

The relocation of the Atlanta Braves to Cobb County
is the largest and most anticipated project
in the history of our community.
And, our partnership with the Braves is proving to be a homerun for Cobb County.

Many have questioned and criticized
how I handled the Atlanta Braves project.

I can tell you today that I sleep well at night
knowing that I did the right thing for Cobb County.

**I want to make it clear today
I am proud of the actions we took
To bring the Braves to Cobb County**

The Atlanta newspaper will never get over it
But the benefit to the economic prosperity
Of Cobb CANNOT be overstated

This partnership has and will
change the future of Cobb County
for the better
FOREVER...

We are still more than one year from opening day
But the results already speak for themselves

Last year at this time,
SunTrust Park
Was a very big pile of dirt
Today, it is clearly a ballpark.

To date, more than \$400 million construction dollars
have been committed or spent; and
More than half of this has gone to Cobb based companies.
The project is on track and on budget.

In addition to the ballpark progress
It was a BIG year for the mixed use development
the Atlanta Braves are building adjacent to SunTrust Park

Now known as the Atlanta Battery,
this unprecedented development
made several major announcements in 2015...

Comcast will occupy a 9 story Class A office Tower
bringing 850 new high tech jobs to Cobb County.

The Atlanta Braves will be bringing back

the iconic Roxy Theatre
right here in Cobb County.

Omni hotels will be opening their 2nd luxury hotel in Georgia
Right here in Cobb County...

And finally, 5 world class restaurants
featuring some of the best known chefs in the Southeast
will open up
right here in Cobb County.

Ultimately, the Atlanta Battery will result in more than
\$500 million of private investment
Right here in Cobb County

Not to mention
it has already spurred an additional \$300 million
of private investment in the surrounding area.

In fact, the Cumberland Community Improvement District
predicts more than \$1.2 billion of investment
in just 5 years!

This growth and these smart investments
all point to a bright future
with endless opportunities.
There is one more thing I want you to understand
that the Atlanta newspaper doesn't want you to know

Unlike almost any other public private stadium development
in modern history
The investment by Cobb County into SunTrust Park is fixed
Under no circumstance
will Cobb County be responsible
for any cost over runs associated with SunTrust Park
Looking ahead, Cobb County is poised for greatness
In 2016 and for decades to come

When we become the first County in Georgia
to implement priority based budgeting
we will strengthen our position
as one of the most fiscally conservative communities
in the country
Thanks to the Cobb voters, the 2016 SPLOST

Was passed by a historic margin
And it begins this month

Public safety will continue to be a top priority
As we begin planning for a new police headquarters
And a world class joint public safety training facility

Further, I am proud to announce that in 2016
the Cobb County Police Department
working with the Sheriff and District Attorney's Offices
will be implementing
one of the strongest anti-gang initiatives in Georgia.
This includes restructuring and reinvestment
in both gang specific law enforcement and prosecution

Cobb County has a message for anyone engaged in gang activity

You are not welcome here!

This past summer the Commission made good on my commitment
to reduce the millage rate on property taxes to the prerecession level

We also made good
on our commitment to fully fund 80 new police officers
and other public safety improvements

In order to make good on these 2 commitments,
our conservative budgeting policies
required us to set the annual water fund transfer rate at 10 percent

This has been common practice in the budget since 1998

Commissioner Birrell has consistently worked in a constructive manner
to reduce the budgets reliance on this transfer

So, I made the commitment to Commissioner Birrell
that the reduction of the water transfer
will be a top priority for any surplus revenue
that comes in above digest projections...
I am proud to announce today
that the actual transfer rate in 2016
will be the lowest it has been in 15 years

And I am committed
to working with the Board to eliminate it completely

Finally, our fiscal health
is giving the Board the opportunity
to revisit the issuance of the 2008 green space bonds
WITHOUT raising taxes

So... **how** are we able to buck the trends...
lower taxes...
reduce the water transfer...
and make *large* investments in public safety and green space?

Two words. SunTrust Park.

And THIS is just the beginning...

Revenues to Cobb have already exceeded projections
and we are still a year from opening day.

I remain confident that this a homerun for ALL OF Cobb
And it will provide unrivaled economic benefit
to Cobb County and its schools
for **decades** to come...

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners

My commitment to you is that we will
Continue to work together to
Maintain this kind of bold and decisive leadership
To keep Cobb County

THE best place to live, Work –
And...Yes.....**PLAY BALL!!!**