

STATE OF THE CITY 2021

SUFFOLK CENTER FOR CULTURAL ARTS

MAY 18, 2021 - NOON LUNCHEON, VIRTUAL EVENT 12:30 TO 2:00 PM

TOGETHER, WE'RE MOVING FORWARD

NATIONAL ANTHEM PERFORMED VIRTUALLY BY THE NANSEMOND RIVER HIGH SCHOOL BELLA VOCE CHORUS.

INVOCATION PRECEDING MEAL PROVIDED VIRTUALLY BY REVEREND HENRY E. DIGGS, PRESIDENT SUFFOLK INTERDENOMINATIONAL MINISTERIAL ALLIANCE.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, SPONSOR REMARKS AND SPONSOR VIDEOS

MAYOR: BLACK TEXT

INTRODUCTION OF MAYOR PROVIDED BY ROBIN S. COOKE, PRESIDENT, PORTSMOUTH/SUFFOLK TOWNEBANK

THANK YOU, ROBIN, FOR THE WARM INTRODUCTION, AND THANK YOU, TOWNEBANK, FOR ALL THAT YOU DO IN OUR COMMUNITY. YOUR LOCAL ROOTS RUN DEEP, AND YOUR EXPANDED CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS IN OUR CITY ARE SHINING EXAMPLES OF THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY EXHIBITED IN EVERY FACET OF YOUR BUSINESS. IT'S EASY TO SEE WHY FORBES MAGAZINE NAMED TOWNEBANK AS ONE OF AMERICA'S BEST BANKS FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW IN 2020.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE, MY TIES TO TOWNEBANK DATE BACK TO 1974. AT THAT TIME, I HAD THE PLEASURE TO MEET MR. BOB ASTON, NOW EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN. BOB WAS AN UP AND COMING BANK EXECUTIVE WITH CITIZENS TRUST BANK, AND I WAS A 23-YEAR-OLD SALES MANAGER WITH A LOCAL AUTO DEALER. BANKING RELATIONSHIPS WERE MUCH MORE PERSONAL BACK THEN BEFORE COMPUTERS AND CREDIT SCORES.

ORGANIZATIONS NORMALLY REFLECT THE CHARACTER OF THEIR LEADERS, SO IT IS NO WONDER TOWNEBANK IS KNOWN FOR THEIR GENEROSITY, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. THANK YOU AGAIN FOR BEING SUCH AN OUTSTANDING CORPORATE PARTNER IN OUR CITY.

WHILE THIS IS MY FIRST STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS AS MAYOR OF SUFFOLK, IT IS ALSO A "FIRST" FOR MANY OTHER REASONS. THE VERY FACT WE ARE MEETING IN A PRIMARILY VIRTUAL FORMAT TODAY SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO WHERE WE WERE AS A REGION AND A NATION AT THE TIME THIS EVENT WAS PLANNED.

WE ARE NOW ON THE VERGE OF EMERGING FROM THE CONSTRAINTS, LIMITATIONS, AND HARDSHIPS CAUSED BY COVID-19. OUR EXPERIENCES AND SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS OVER THE LAST 15 MONTHS SPEAKS TO WHO WE ARE AS A COMMUNITY, AND CONFIRMS THAT WE ARE STILL FOCUSED ON SHOWING UP FOR ONE ANOTHER. TO THOSE OF YOU WITH US PHYSICALLY, AND TO THOSE OF YOU ATTENDING VIRTUALLY, **WELCOME.**

THE SUFFOLK STATE OF THE CITY IS PRESENTED BY THE **HAMPTON ROADS CHAMBER**, AND ON BEHALF OF EVERYONE HERE AND THOSE JOINING US THROUGH THE WONDERS OF TECHNOLOGY, WE WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO ALL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CHAMBER – **THANK YOU.**

YOUR TAGLINE – **THE CHAMBER MEANS BUSINESS** – IS NOT JUST A CATCHPHRASE, IT'S SOMETHING YOU EAT, SLEEP, AND BREATHE EACH AND EVERY DAY. YOUR DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT, ESPECIALLY DURING THESE TRYING TIMES, HAVE HELPED COUNTLESS BUSINESSES TO NOT ONLY SURVIVE, BUT ALSO TO THRIVE.

I WOULD LIKE TO NOW ASK THAT MY FELLOW MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED AS I CALL YOUR NAME.

VICE MAYOR LEROY BENNETT, COUNCILPERSON SHELLEY BUTLER BARLOW, COUNCILMAN ROGER FAWCETT, COUNCILMAN

DONALD GOLDBERG, COUNCILMAN TIM JOHNSON, COUNCILMAN LUE WARD, AND COUNCILMAN LEOTIS WILLIAMS.

TO SAY THAT THESE LAST FEW MONTHS AND YEAR HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT – IN THE TRUEST SENSE OF THE WORD. THIS HAS BEEN A TIME OF GREAT TURMOIL, BUT IT HAS ALSO BEEN A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY – AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH. NOT ONLY AS A CITY COUNCIL, BUT AS AN ENTIRE CITY FOLLOWING THE HISTORIC CHALLENGES WE FACED. IT’S AN HONOR TO WORK WITH ALL OF YOU ON BEHALF OF THIS WONDERFUL COMMUNITY.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK OUR INTERIM CITY MANAGER, ALBERT MOOR.

IT TAKES COURAGE, OPEN-MINDEDNESS, RESPECT, AND GREAT DETERMINATION TO LEAD, ESPECIALLY DURING THESE TIMES. REPUTATIONS ARE FORGED IN TIMES OF CRISIS, AND THE WAY YOU HAVE RESPONDED DURING THIS PANDEMIC HAS STRENGTHENED SUFFOLK’S REPUTATION FOR RESPONSIVE, THOUGHTFUL, AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.

TO OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS AND AMAZING CITY EMPLOYEES – THROUGHOUT THIS PANDEMIC, YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED YOUR UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO THE RESIDENTS OF OUR COMMUNITY; OPERATED WITH FLEXIBILITY WHILE FACING CONSTANTLY CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES; AND REMAINED OPTIMISTIC KNOWING THAT WE WOULD GET THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT TIMES **TOGETHER**. IN FACT, LET’S TAKE A FIRSTHAND LOOK AT JUST HOW WE RESPONDED TO THIS CHALLENGE:

(NARRATED VIDEO – APPROXIMATELY 4.37 MINUTES)

UNPRECEDENTED. HISTORIC. EXTRAORDINARY. THESE ARE ALL TERMS REGULARLY USED WHEN DISCUSSING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. WHILE THEY ARE ALL TRUE STATEMENTS, THEY ARE WOEFULLY INADEQUATE TO DESCRIBE THE TRUE IMPACT OF WHAT WE’VE EXPERIENCED SINCE THE EARLY SPRING OF 2020.

THE NUMBERS OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED FROM THE VIRUS ACROSS OUR NATION ARE HEARTBREAKING AND STAGGERING, BUT WE'VE ALSO FOUND HOPE AND LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS FOR THOSE THAT HAVE RECOVERED FROM THE VIRUS, AND FOR THOSE THAT WILL BE SAVED AS A RESULT OF VACCINES THAT ARE NOW AVAILABLE TO US.

WE ARE FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR OUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, FIRST RESPONDERS, AND FRONTLINE WORKERS WHO LITERALLY RISKED THEIR LIVES FOR OUR COMMUNITY. THEIR TIRELESS DEDICATION, PROFESSIONALISM, AND THE RELENTLESS DETERMINATION EXHIBITED BY THESE WARRIORS DURING OUR DARKEST HOURS AND BEYOND WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN. OVER THIS LAST YEAR, OUR CITIZENS HAVE REACHED OUT IN COUNTLESS WAYS TO SHOW THEIR APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE FOR THEIR SELFLESS ACTS OF SERVICE AND COMPASSION TOWARDS THEIR FELLOW MAN.

AS THE OUTBREAK FIRST BEGAN TO TAKE HOLD, WE RECALIBRATED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT WE CONTINUED OUR VITAL SERVICES TO OUR CITIZENS, WHILE ALSO ENSURING THAT WE FILLED NEW NEEDS BY HELPING OUR MOST VULNERABLE RESIDENTS AND THOSE WHO LOST THEIR JOBS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC. WE HAD TO CHANGE PRACTICALLY EVERY PROCESS AND PROCEDURE FOR GOVERNING AND SERVING.

THROUGH IT ALL, THE EMPLOYEES OF OUR CITY GOVERNMENT HAVE PREVAILED, PERSISTED, AND ACCOMMODATED NEW WORK PRACTICES WHILE PUTTING THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE FIRST. IN FACT, FOR MORE THAN FIVE MONTHS, WE LET OUR CITIZENS KNOW THEY WEREN'T FORGOTTEN IN A DAILY SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN ADVISING, *"WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!"*

WHEN PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS FORCED THE CLOSURE OF OUR COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTERS SERVING OUR SENIORS AND OUR LIBRARIES, THE IMPACT WAS FELT BY OUR MOST SUSCEPTIBLE CITIZENS.

UTILIZING FEDERAL CARES ACT FUNDING, THE SUFFOLK ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT PARTNERED WITH 30 LOCAL FAMILY-

OWNED RESTAURANTS BEGINNING IN MID-MARCH 2020 TO PROVIDE MEALS TO FAMILIES WHO MAY HAVE LOST THEIR JOBS OR HAD THEIR INCOME REDUCED THROUGH TEMPORARY FURLOUGHS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. AS PART OF THE “*LOVE LOCAL, BUY SUFFOLK*” INITIATIVE, APPROXIMATELY 32,000 MEALS HAVE BEEN DELIVERED TO FAMILIES IN NEED THUS FAR, AND THE PROGRAM CONTINUES AT THIS TIME.

THE SALVATION ARMY, OPEN DOOR CHURCH, GREATER FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - ORLANDO, TEMPLE BETH EL, AND BETHLEHEM CHRISTIAN CHURCH WERE LOCATIONS SELECTED ACROSS THE ENTIRE CITY TO HELP SERVE THE COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING DRIVE-THROUGH MEAL DISTRIBUTION OUTLETS. THIS ONGOING INITIATIVE TAKES PLACE AT EACH OF THEIR LOCATIONS ON VARIOUS DAYS OF THE WEEK.

THIS AMAZING PARTNERSHIP NOT ONLY ENSURED THAT THOSE MOST AT-RISK WOULDN'T GO HUNGRY, BUT ALSO HELPED THE PARTICIPATING SMALL BUSINESSES AND THEIR EMPLOYEES THAT WERE STRUGGLING TO ENDURE AND REMAIN OPEN.

STAFF ARE CONTINUING TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE INCLUDING ON-LINE SERVICES, VIRTUAL JOB FAIRS, AND MORE TO HELP THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN IMPACTED. IN ADDITION, THEY SHARE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKE CONNECTIONS SINCE MANY BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITY ARE STILL HIRING.

MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE IN THE FORM OF FEDERALLY-FUNDED SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS WERE PROVIDED FOR BOTH BRICK-AND-MORTAR AND HOME-BASED BUSINESSES TO HELP THEM WEATHER THE STORM. A TOTAL OF FOUR ROUNDS OF GRANTS FOR ASSISTANCE WAS OFFERED IN 2020 AND 2021, WITH OVER 300 GRANTS ISSUED, PROVIDING OVER \$1,223,000 OF TOTAL GRANT FUNDS.

OUR DEDICATED AND TALENTED LIBRARY, TOURISM, AND PARKS & RECREATION PERSONNEL ROSE TO THE CHALLENGE AND HAVE CONTINUED TO KEEP CITIZENS OF ALL AGES ENGAGED, INFORMED,

AND ENTERTAINED THROUGH A VARIETY OF “VIRTUAL” AND ON-LINE OPPORTUNITIES AND EVENTS.

THE SUFFOLK DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES IS PROVIDING UTILITY BILL PANDEMIC RELIEF PROGRAMS UTILIZING SEVERAL FORMS OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR QUALIFYING RESIDENTIAL AND NON-RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS WHO EXPERIENCED FINANCIAL HARDSHIP DUE TO EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS CAUSED BY THE PANDEMIC.

EARLY ON, MANY CHURCHES ALSO OPENED THEIR DOORS TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE CITY FOR COVID-19 TESTING SITES, AND THEN LATER HOSTED VACCINATION CLINICS. NONE OF THESE EVENTS WOULD HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL WITHOUT THE DEVOTION OF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS.

WE KNOW THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC INTERRUPTED ALL OF OUR LIVES IN WAYS WE COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED. HOWEVER, PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES HELP US RECOGNIZE HOW INTERWOVEN OUR LIVES ARE, AND THIS TRAGEDY HAS LIKEWISE CREATED INVALUABLE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS.

THROUGH IT ALL, THE ACTIONS OF OUR FIRST RESPONDERS, MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, CITY EMPLOYEES, CITIZENS, AND SMALL BUSINESSES REMINDED US THAT *HOPE, KINDNESS, AND COMPASSION* HAVEN'T BEEN CANCELLED. ***WE ARE TRULY IN THIS TOGETHER.***

IN A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY, *SUFFOLK ONCE AGAIN PROVED IT'S PASSION FOR COMMUNITY.*

TO EVERYONE THAT HAS SUFFERED PERSONAL LOSS IN THIS PANDEMIC, *OUR HEARTS ARE WITH YOU.* WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY SUFFOLK FAMILIES THAT WILL NEVER BE FREE OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19. THERE IS A SAYING, “*GRIEF IS IN TWO PARTS. THE FIRST IS LOSS. THE SECOND IS THE REMAKING OF LIFE*”. FOR THOSE WHO ARE HURTING, WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS **TOGETHER.**

I, TOO, WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO PERSONALLY THANK EVERYONE IN THE CITY OF SUFFOLK. YOUR COURAGE, FORTITUDE, PERSEVERANCE, SELFLESSNESS, AND DETERMINATION HAVE ENABLED OUR COMMUNITY TO CARRY ON.

I'D ALSO LIKE TO RECOGNIZE AND THANK OUR MILITARY – ACTIVE DUTY AND RETIRED – AS THIS MONTH WE CELEBRATE “NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH”. AS A FORMER COMMISSIONED OFFICER IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY RESERVE, MY APPRECIATION AND RESPECT RUNS DEEP. WE ALSO HONOR THOSE AMERICANS WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES IN DEFENSE OF THE FREEDOMS WE ALL ENJOY TODAY.

WE ARE BEYOND FORTUNATE THAT MORE THAN 3,000 MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WORK IN SUFFOLK AT NAVAL INFORMATION FORCES, NAVY CYBER DEFENSE OPERATIONS COMMAND, NAVAL NETWORK WARFARE COMMAND, JOINT STAFF HAMPTON ROADS, AND U.S. FLEET CYBER COMMAND SOUTH. WE CAN BE IMMENSELY PROUD THAT THE DYNAMIC WORK THESE CYBER-WARRIORS PERFORM TO ADVANCE AND PROTECT THE *ENTIRE COUNTRY* ACTUALLY TAKES PLACE RIGHT HERE IN SUFFOLK. NOT TO MENTION THE FACT THAT THOUSANDS OF OUR MILITARY HEROES AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE ALSO CHOSEN TO CALL SUFFOLK “HOME”.

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, SUFFOLK'S STATE OF THE CITY EVENT WAS CANCELLED LAST SPRING AS WE FOCUSED 100% OF OUR ATTENTION ON BATTLING THE PANDEMIC. MAKE NO MISTAKE – THIS EFFORT HAS DEMANDED AND CONTINUES TO RECEIVE YOUR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT'S ABSOLUTE BEST.

WE NOW COME **TOGETHER** THIS AFTERNOON WITH TWO REMARKABLE YEARS IN OUR REAR-VIEW MIRROR. I COULDN'T RESIST THE OPPORTUNITY TO REFER TO A CAR... GO FIGURE!

THESE SUCCESSES ARE ESPECIALLY REMARKABLE, CONSIDERING THE UNCERTAINTIES THAT HAVE SURROUNDED US. THE EVENTS OF 2019 AND 2020 ALSO INCLUDED TWO SEPARATE DEVASTATING TORNADOES THAT TOUCHED DOWN, AFFECTING HOMEOWNERS AND BUSINESSES ALIKE. OUR HEALTH,

PROFESSIONAL, AND PERSONAL LIVES HAVE ALSO BEEN IMPACTED, AND HAVE REINFORCED THE RESILIENT NATURE OF THE PEOPLE OF SUFFOLK. THROUGH IT ALL, OUR CITY AND COMMUNITY CAME **TOGETHER** TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND CREATIVELY ADAPT TO ALL THAT CAME OUR WAY.

THIS CITY MAY EXPERIENCE HARDSHIP, BUT WE ARE DETERMINED TO MAKE OUR COMMUNITY AND THE HEALTH OF OUR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES EVEN BETTER THAN BEFORE. INSTEAD OF ME TELLING YOU ABOUT IT, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT HOW MUCH CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WHEN WE CARE FOR EACH OTHER AND WORK **TOGETHER**...

(VIDEO – APPROXIMATELY 25 MINUTES.)

TOGETHER HAS BEEN A COMMON REFRAIN HEARD TODAY, AND FOR GOOD REASON. THE WORD ITSELF IS DEFINED AS **COOPERATIVE AND SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS. TOGETHER IS NEVER ALONE. TOGETHER IS AN ADVERB INDICATING WHEN TWO OR MORE PEOPLE OR THINGS THAT ARE WITH EACH OTHER – ASSEMBLED IN A GROUP OR UNITED IN GOALS.** YES, THAT TRULY DESCRIBES SUFFOLK.

AND THAT'S JUST PART OF THE REASON WHY SO MANY PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES ALIKE HAVE CHOSEN OUR CITY. OUR POPULATION NUMBERS ARE CONTINUING TO GROW ACCORDING TO THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, AND WE REMAIN ONE OF VIRGINIA'S FASTER-GROWING LOCALITIES.

WE CAN ALSO PROUDLY PROCLAIM THAT WE ARE ONE OF AN ELITE FEW CITIES OR TOWNS IN OUR REGION WITH A TRIPLE TRIPLE-A RATING THAT WAS REAFFIRMED IN 2020. RATING AGENCIES HAD THIS TO SAY ABOUT SUFFOLK IN THEIR ANALYSIS: FITCH STATED, "A HIGH LEVEL OF FINANCIAL RESILIENCE AND GAP CLOSING ABILITY." MOODY'S SAID THE RATING WAS PARTIALLY BASED ON A "STRONG AND STABLE FUND BALANCE AND LIQUIDITY SUPPORTED BY FORMAL FISCAL POLICIES AND CONSERVATIVE BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS.' LASTLY, STANDARD & POOR'S HIGHLIGHTED THE CITY'S STRONG MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN RESIDENTIAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INDUSTRIAL

DEVELOPMENTS, “WHICH HAVE GROWN THE STRONG TAX BASE AND DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY.” THESE RATINGS ARE INDICATIVE OF THE CURRENT FINANCIAL STATE OF OUR CITY AND FORECAST FOR THE FUTURE. OUR CITY’S CREDIT WORTHINESS HAS ENABLED REFINANCINGS THAT RESULTED IN \$47 MILLION DOLLARS IN DEBT SERVICE SAVINGS SINCE 2014.

STAFF HAVE CONTINUED TO AGGRESSIVELY PURSUE NON-CAPITAL PROJECT GRANTS AND SECURED MORE THAN **\$13.5 MILLION DOLLARS IN 2019 AND 2020 COMBINED**, INCLUDING CARES ACT FUNDING, THUS ALLEVIATING SOME OF THE TAX BURDEN ON OUR CITIZENS.

WE HAVE SUBMITTED A BUDGET THAT WILL MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE SERVICE LEVELS WITH NO TAX INCREASE, RETAINING OUR POSITION AS THE 3RD LOWEST IN THE ENTIRE REGION. IN FACT, **62% OF OUR TOTAL BUDGET IS INVESTED IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY**, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THESE VITAL BEDROCKS OF A STRONG COMMUNITY.

WITHOUT A DOUBT, THERE’S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT SUFFOLK. SO SPECIAL, IN FACT, THAT MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE CHOOSING TO CALL SUFFOLK HOME. WE’VE SEEN THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN HOME SALES IN THE REGION, GROWING BY 10.2% OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR. WE’RE ALSO RANKED IN THE TOP TEN WHEN IT COMES TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN VIRGINIA.

AS A FAST-GROWING CITY, IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ENSURE THAT THIS GROWTH IS WELL-MANAGED BY THOROUGH AND THOUGHTFUL PLANNING. WE MUST STRIVE TO PROTECT THE UNIQUENESS AND CHARACTER OF OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITIES. MEETING THE INCREASING NEED FOR HOUSING, THERE WERE ALMOST 1400 BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED ACROSS ALL RESIDENTIAL CATEGORIES IN 2020. WE’VE ALSO SEEN OVER 426 PERMITS TO DATE IN 2021.

ATTESTING TO OUR DESIRABILITY AND OVERALL APPEAL TO HOMEBUYERS, SUFFOLK’S MEDIAN SALES PRICE IS THE HIGHEST IN THE 7-CITIES, AT \$295,000.

WHETHER IN THE MARKET FOR A SINGLE-FAMILY HOME IN A NEW, ESTABLISHED, OR HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD – A STUNNING DREAM HOME OR EXPANSIVE ESTATE – A LUXURY APARTMENT OR CONDOMINIUM – RURAL FARMETTE OR RETIREMENT COTTAGE – OR IF YOUR TASTES LEAN TOWARDS AN EXCITINGLY ECLECTIC DOWNTOWN ABODE, YOU’LL FIND IT ALL HERE IN SUFFOLK!

TIME MAGAZINE RECENTLY NOTED THAT OUR REGION HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGES OF RESIDENTS IN THE PRIME RENTAL AGES OF 20 AND 35, AND RANKED OUR REGION AS NUMBER ONE IN THE UNITED STATES FOR ATTRACTING MILLENNIALS.

LET’S HEAR FROM EDWIN GASKINS OF PEANUT CROSSING, PROVIDING OUR NEWEST DOWNTOWN UPSCALE LOFT-STYLE APARTMENT LIVING, CREATIVE WORKSPACES, AND FLEXIBLE STORAGE OPPORTUNITIES – ALL LOCATED WITHIN MORE THAN 10 HISTORIC ACRES ...

“MOST FOLKS MAY NOT REALIZE IT, BUT THIS SITE, THE GOLDEN PEANUT SITE, IS ACTUALLY A VERY HISTORIC AND IMPORTANT PIECE OF SUFFOLK’S INDUSTRIAL HISTORY. THIS IS ACTUALLY ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING EXAMPLES OF A PEANUT MANUFACTURING PLANT IN VIRGINIA, AND THUS THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES WAS SUPER EXCITED TO REALLY GET OUR APPLICATION AND WORK WITH US IN THIS REDEVELOPMENT PLAN. WE SAW THIS SITE AS HAVING POTENTIAL, BUT IN SOME WAYS BEING IN NOT THE IDEAL LOCATION, BECAUSE MOST OF THE DEVELOPMENT HAD OCCURRED DOWNTOWN, AND EVEN THOUGH THIS WAS A STRATEGIC REDEVELOPMENT SITE IN THE CITY’S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, NOBODY HAD YET JUMPED THE TRACKS SO TO SPEAK, TO REALLY START ANYTHING SIGNIFICANT ON THIS SIDE. SO WE WERE PROUD TO BE THAT INAUGURAL EFFORT. IT’S BEEN PLEASING TO SEE THAT EVEN WHILE WE’VE BEEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION, AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE SITE, HOUSES ARE BEING RENOVATED. THERE’S SOME NEW CONSTRUCTION GOING ON. SO WE’RE BIG BELIEVERS IN THE PHILOSOPHY THAT “INVESTMENT BEGETS INVESTMENT”, AND WE SEE THIS LARGE INVESTMENT HAVING RIPPLE EFFECTS THROUGHOUT SOUTH SUFFOLK,

WHILE BEING FRANKLY ADJACENT TO DOWNTOWN. SO THE SUCCESS OF DOWNTOWN AND THE SUCCESS OF OUR SITE WILL REALLY SYMBIOTICALLY PLAY OFF OF EACH OTHER.”

UNDERSTANDABLY, WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE AND RAISE A FAMILY DEPENDS HEAVILY ON THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLS. WE’VE CONTINUED TO SHOW OUR COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION NOT ONLY THROUGH THE BUDGET PROCESS, BUT ALSO THROUGH THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SCHOOLS TO MEET OUR GROWING NEEDS.

BUILDING A SCHOOL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR **ALL** OF OUR CHILDREN IS NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL BOARD ALONE; IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF *ALL OF US* TO UNITE AROUND A SHARED VISION.

DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, 2020 MARKED A DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE THAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES, AND A DIFFERENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE WHERE TEACHERS HAVE HAD TO RAPIDLY ADAPT, BE CREATIVE, AND SHIFT ROLES.

EXTENDED SCHOOL CLOSURES, TOGETHER WITH ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS, ARE A TWIN UNPRECEDENTED SHOCK TO EDUCATION. WE KNOW THESE LOSSES CAN’T BE FIXED BY BUDGETS ALONE; WE MUST DO ALL WE CAN TO ADDRESS THESE LEARNING LOSSES, AND TO ENSURE THAT **ALL** OF OUR CHILDREN CAN MOVE FORWARD **TOGETHER** SO ANY RESULTING EDUCATIONAL GAPS DON’T WIDEN.

FOR YEARS, SUFFOLK PUBLIC SCHOOLS’ MOTTO HAS BEEN, *“EVERY CHILD A STAR”*. IN EVERY CLASSROOM, AT EVERY GRADE LEVEL, OUR SCHOOLS HAVE OFFERED STUDENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND ENGAGE THEIR WORLD LIKE NEVER BEFORE. *LIKEWISE, IT CAN BE SAID THAT LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT IS NOW MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE.*

HELPING TO PROVIDE THE “POLISH” FOR THESE SHINING STARS IS DR. JOLEEN NEIGHBOURS, FINE ARTS FACILITATOR WITH THE TEACHING & LEARNING DEPARTMENT OF SUFFOLK PUBLIC

SCHOOLS. HER *BELLA VOCE* CHORUS PERFORMED THE ANTHEM FOR TODAY'S STATE OF THE CITY EVENT.

SHE AND HER TALENTED STUDENTS WERE CHOSEN TO PILOT A NEW PROGRAM CALLED *YOUR VOICE IS POWER*, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PHARRELL WILLIAMS' NONPROFIT, AND OTHERS. IN FACT, SHE RECENTLY LEARNED THAT FOUR OF THESE YOUNG LADIES ARE NATIONAL SEMI-FINALISTS IN THE COMPETITION PART OF THE *YOUR VOICE IS POWER* PROGRAM ...

“SO, WE WERE INCREDIBLY FORTUNATE TO GET SELECTED FOR THE PILOT PROGRAM OF YOUR VOICE IS POWER THROUGH YELLOW EAR SKETCH AND GEORGIA TECH. IT'S BEEN AN ABSOLUTELY AMAZING OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR YOUNG LADIES. THROUGH CODING, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND MUSIC, THEY'VE REALLY LEARNED TO EMPOWER THEMSELVES, AND DEVELOP THEMSELVES FOR CAREERS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL. WE'VE REALLY STARTED LOOKING AT THE ARTS AS A TRADE, AND NOT SO MUCH AS A CRAFT, AND SO THESE YOUNG LADIES BEING AS BRILLIANT AND AS RESILIENT AS THEY ARE, REALLY THREW THEMSELVES IN THERE LEARNING SOMETHING NEW AND SOMETHING THAT THEY CAN TRULY TAKE WITH THEM FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.” (INSERT PHARRELL WILLIAMS VIDEO)

2020 HAS ALSO FORCED US TO DEFINE **QUALITY OF LIFE** DIFFERENTLY THAN WE DID IN THE PRE-COVID WORLD. WE'VE HAD TO MAKE VERY DIFFICULT INDIVIDUAL DECISIONS, AND VERY DIFFICULT GOVERNMENTAL DECISIONS, AS WELL. STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN RIGHTS AND REGULATIONS IS NEVER EASY.

THROUGH IT ALL, WE'VE WORKED CLOSELY WITH OUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND LOCAL HEALTH CARE LEADERS, INCLUDING DR. JEFFREY FORMAN, OF BAYVIEW PHYSICIAN'S GROUP

SO AS OF TODAY, THE VACCINATIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE IN SUFFOLK AND EVERYONE IN VIRGINIA. THE VACCINATIONS ... THERE ARE PLENTY OF VACCINES OUT THERE. I THINK FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, AND OUR GROUP, WE WOULD LIKE TO ENCOURAGE EVERYONE WHO IS ELIGIBLE

TO GET VACCINATIONS. WE ARE RAPIDLY APPROACHING WHAT WE WOULD CALL “HERD IMMUNITY”. WE’VE SEEN THE NUMBERS OF PATIENTS REQUIRING HOSPITALIZATIONS AND THE CRITICAL ILLNESS OF PATIENTS GO WAY DOWN. SO WE ARE, AS A COMMUNITY, MOVING FORWARD, AND WE WOULD ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO GET THEIR VACCINE SO THAT WE CAN COME OUT OF THIS PANDEMIC TOGETHER.

WHEN ONE HEARS THE WORD “OUTSTANDING” IN SUFFOLK, IT’S ONLY NATURAL TO THINK OF OUR EVER INCREASING AND EXPANDING HEALTHCARE OPTIONS.

IN 2020, THEY ALL PIVOTED THEIR WORKFORCES AND RESOURCES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE CARE AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

LET’S NOT FORGET, HOWEVER, THAT GROWTH ALSO CONTINUED. BON SECOURS, ONE OF TODAY’S EVENT SPONSORS, MADE A CLINICAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT AT HARBOUR VIEW; AND ALSO INVESTED IN MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND OFFICE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE NEW VIRGINIA ORTHOPAEDIC AND SPINE SPECIALISTS LOCATION ON CENTERBROOKE LANE.

SENTARA OBICI HOSPITAL KICKED OFF THEIR EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT EXPANSION, ADDING OVER 7,000 SQUARE FEET TO THE CAMPUS, WITH RENOVATIONS TO THE EXISTING DEPARTMENT UNDERWAY.

CHKD IS ALSO ADDING NEW SERVICES IN SUFFOLK, AND WILL BE CONSOLIDATING MANY OF THEIR ESTABLISHED SERVICES IN A SINGLE, CONVENIENT LOCATION AT THEIR NEW HEALTH CENTER AT HARBOUR VIEW, SCHEDULED TO OPEN THIS SUMMER. THE NEW LOCATION WILL BE COMPRISED OF TWO ADJACENT BUILDINGS. ONE WILL BE HOME TO PHYSICAL, OCCUPATIONAL, SPEECH AND SPORTS MEDICINE THERAPY. THE OTHER WILL OFFER LAB, RADIOLOGY – INCLUDING ULTRASOUND, AND SHARED CLINIC SPACE FOR SUBSPECIALISTS.

PUBLIC SAFETY IS ALSO ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY'S QUALITY OF LIFE, AND IT'S ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS PEOPLE LOOK AT WHEN JUDGING A CITY.

WE'VE ALL WITNESSED INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AND UPHEAVAL THIS PAST YEAR ACROSS THE NATION. REVERSING THE TREND IS NOT MERELY A POLICING ISSUE. STEMMING THESE ACTIONS MUST COME FROM A COMBINED COMMUNITY RESPONSE, WITH **EVERYONE** AT THE TABLE WITH AN EQUAL VOICE SO OUR CITIZENS ARE INCLUDED, VALUED, AND HEARD. WE KNOW THAT *UNITY IS STRENGTH ... WHEN THERE IS TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION, WONDERFUL THINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED.*

SUFFOLK IS NOT ONLY FORTUNATE TO HAVE THE VERY BEST PUBLIC SAFETY PROFESSIONALS IN THE REGION, BUT THEY ARE ALSO PREPARED WITH THE VERY BEST TRAINING, EQUIPMENT, AND TECHNOLOGIES – ALL DESIGNED TO KEEP OUR CITIZENS SAFE AND TO PROPEL OUR ENTIRE CITY FORWARD.

THE SUFFOLK POLICE DEPARTMENT'S RECENT PRESTIGIOUS REACCREDITATION BY CALEA IS AN INDICATOR THAT THEY ARE FOLLOWING THE *VERY BEST* PRACTICES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT, INCLUDING SUBSTANTIVE OVERSIGHT, POLICIES IN KEEPING WITH NEW STANDARDS, TRANSPARENCY, AND CONSISTENCY.

THEY'VE ALSO REESTABLISHED THEIR EXPLORER POST PROGRAM DESIGNED TO HELP YOUTH MAKE A MORE INFORMED DECISION ABOUT A POTENTIAL CAREER IN LAW ENFORCEMENT OR RELATED CRIMINAL JUSTICE FIELD AS THEY LOOK TO DISCOVER THEIR FUTURE, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING MEMBERS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE IS CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING AND CONSTRUCTING A NEW FIRE STATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY CENTER NEAR COLLEGE DRIVE TO PROVIDE FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES TO THE HIGHLY POPULATED AREA OF HARBOUR VIEW.

THEIR COMPASSION AND COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY WAS RECENTLY EXHIBITED WHEN PARAMEDICS DELIVERED “MORE THAN A MEAL”, AND ADMINISTERED COVID-19 VACCINES TO HOMEBOUND SENIORS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MEALS ON WHEELS AND THE BAYVIEW PHYSICIANS GROUP. EACH AND EVERY DAY, SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE LIVES UP TO THEIR MOTTO, ‘*OUR FAMILY, PROTECTING YOURS*”.

PUBLIC SAFETY IS MORE THAN JUST RESPONSE TIMES AND CRIME STATS – IT’S ALSO ABOUT ENGAGEMENT AND MUTUAL RESPECT. WE KNOW THAT INVOLVED AND INFORMED CITIZENS WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR **ALL** TO SUCCEED AND THRIVE ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE THAT WE ENJOY.

WHEN WE’RE CONNECTED TO OTHERS, WE BECOME BETTER PEOPLE. THE SPACES WHERE WE GATHER GIVE A CITY ITS CHARACTER, AND ARE WHERE WE MAKE SHARED MEMORIES AS WE *RELAX AND EXHALE*. GRANTED, WE’VE NOT BEEN ABLE TO DO A LOT OF THAT **TOGETHER** LATELY, BUT MOVING FORWARD, I’M SURE WE’LL ALL BE MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME! THANKFULLY, WE’VE GOT A WIDE VARIETY OF OPPORTUNITIES AND VENUES TO DO JUST THAT.

THE REVITALIZATION OF OUR HISTORIC COMMERCIAL CORE CONTINUES, AND OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL ASSET OF DOWNTOWN IS ITS **DIVERSITY**. WITH ATTRACTIVE AND INVITING DECORATIVE LIGHTING, PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY SIDEWALKS, AMPLE PARKING, AND NEW AND ENHANCED OUTDOOR DINING CHOICES, IF YOU HAVEN’T JOINED US LATELY, COME EXPERIENCE, SEE, AND TASTE WHAT SO MANY ARE TALKING ABOUT!

THE NEW DOWNTOWN SUFFOLK BRANDING INITIATIVE WAS UNVEILED TO FURTHER ENHANCE AND BRING AWARENESS TO THIS IMPORTANT CORRIDOR. THE NEW BRANDING EFFORT CREATES A STRONG VISUAL IDENTITY TO BRING RECOGNITION TO THE DISTRICT AND REPRESENTS A CREATIVE, THRIVING, AND COOPERATIVE ENVIRONMENT, WHILE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROOTS AND HERITAGE OF THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY. BUSINESSES IN THE DOWNTOWN DISTRICT WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS THE LOGO AND OTHER MARKETING TOOLS TO SHARE

MESSAGES IN AN EXCITING AND ENGAGING WAY THAT TAILORS TO KEY AUDIENCES SUCH AS RESIDENTS, VISITORS, DEVELOPERS, AND OTHER BUSINESSES.

THE DOWNTOWN WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE PROJECT HAS KICKED OFF, WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY MAKE FOR A MORE ATTRACTIVE, COHESIVE, AND EASILY NAVIGABLE EXPERIENCE FOR DOWNTOWN DINERS, SHOPPERS, AND VISITORS ALIKE.

IN EVERY CORNER OF OUR CITY, YOU'LL FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO ENJOY A TASTY FUSION OF CULTURES, FEATURING EVERYTHING FROM BEST-KEPT CULINARY SECRETS, TO NATIONAL AWARD WINNING RESTAURANTS. ALL PROMISE A SAVORY BLEND OF THE CITY'S SIGNATURE FLAVORS, WITH MANY NEW ESTABLISHMENTS OPENING JUST THIS YEAR. WE'VE DEFINITELY PUT OURSELVES ON THE MAP AS A FOODIE'S DESTINATION.

MAPS AND DESTINATIONS OF COURSE LEAD US TO **TRANSPORTATION**. WE'RE CONTINUING TO MOVE FORWARD, AND GREAT THINGS ARE COMING DOWN THE ROAD – LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY!

THE ROUTE 58 – HOLLAND ROAD PROJECT WILL SOON BE UNDERWAY, WITH AN OFFICIAL GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY SCHEDULED IN EARLY JUNE. MORE THAN 10 YEARS IN THE MAKING, THIS IS EASILY *THE BIGGEST CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ROADWAY PROJECT THE CITY OF SUFFOLK HAS EVER UNDERTAKEN*. THIS PROJECT IS NOT ONLY IMPORTANT ON A LOCAL LEVEL, BUT IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT ON A REGIONAL, STATEWIDE, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, WITH IMPACTS AFFECTING THE PORT OF VIRGINIA, AS WELL. THE ROAD WIDENING AND MULTIPLE OTHER IMPROVEMENTS ALONG THIS BUSY CORRIDOR WILL FURTHER ENHANCE EXISTING AND CONTINUING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT. FUNDING FOR THIS MASSIVE PROJECT IS POSSIBLE THROUGH FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL DOLLARS, WITH MOTORISTS TRAVELING THIS BUSY CORRIDOR EVENTUALLY REAPING A MORE CONVENIENT, LESS CONGESTED, AND SAFER COMMUTE.

ADVANCING OUR COMMUNITY'S QUALITY OF LIFE GOES MUCH DEEPER THAN HEALTHCARE, PUBLIC SAFETY, FINE DINING,

ENTERTAINMENT, AND TRANSPORTATION. *THE QUALITY OF OUR COMMUNITY IS EVIDENT IN THE TIES THAT BIND US, AND OUR COMMITMENT TO MAKING SUFFOLK THE BEST IT CAN BE.*

NO MATTER WHAT WAY YOU LOOK AT IT, TOGETHER IS ALWAYS BETTER!

THERE IS A QUOTE, *“RECREATION AND DIVERSION ARE AS NECESSARY TO OUR WELL-BEING AS THE MORE SERIOUS PURSUITS OF LIFE”*. TRUER WORDS WERE NEVER SPOKEN, ESPECIALLY GIVEN EVENTS OVER THE LAST YEAR.

WE KNOW THAT THRIVING COMMUNITIES INCLUDE SAFE PLACES TO *LIVE, WORK, AND LEARN*, BUT WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN PLACES TO *PLAY*, AS WELL.

SUFFOLK PARKS & RECREATION CONTINUES TO EXPAND AND ENHANCE THE MULTITUDE OF THEIR EXISTING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. MOST RECENTLY WAS THE OPENING OF THE CITY’S SECOND INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND AT BENNETTS CREEK PARK. THIS WELCOME ADDITION TO THE ALREADY EXTENSIVE OPTIONS THERE PROVIDES AN INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR FAMILY, AND THEIR FRIENDS.

OUR CITIZENS CAN ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT PARK ACROSS FROM THE HILTON GARDEN INN SUFFOLK RIVERFRONT ON NORTH MAIN STREET ALONG THE BEAUTIFUL NANSEMOND RIVER. CONSTANT’S NORTH PARK WILL BE A COMPLIMENTARY ADDITION TO THE IMMENSELY POPULAR CONSTANT’S WHARF PARK & MARINA, HOME TO A PORTION OF THE POPULAR SUMMER TGIF CONCERT SERIES AND OTHER SPECIAL EVENTS, IN ADDITION TO A KAYAK LAUNCH FOR NATURE AND WATER LOVERS.

CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY AT THE NEW BENNETT’S CREEK RECREATION CENTER. MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH A LAND EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE CITY OF SUFFOLK AND THE FORMER U.S. ARMY RESERVE CENTER AT THAT LOCATION, THIS LONG-ANTICIPATED FACILITY WILL SERVE THE

DENSELY POPULATED NORTHERN URBAN/SUBURBAN GROWTH AREA.

PARKS & RECREATION ALSO PROVIDED A *SPRINKLE OF HOLIDAY CHEER* AT THEIR INAUGURAL *SUFFOLK FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS* AT SLEEPY HOLE PARK. THE FREE DRIVE-THROUGH LIGHT DISPLAY HELPED BRIGHTEN THE HOLIDAYS FOR FAMILIES LOOKING FOR SOME SENSE OF NORMALCY IN THEIR CELEBRATIONS, AND ADDITIONAL LIGHT THEME DISPLAYS WILL BE ADDED EACH YEAR MOVING FORWARD TO FURTHER ENHANCE THE FESTIVE EXPERIENCE.

OUR DIVISION OF TOURISM CONTINUES TO ENTHUSIASTICALLY MARKET OUR CITY FOR LOCALS, AS WELL AS LEISURE AND BUSINESS TRAVELERS.

JUST ONE PIECE OF THEIR REVAMPED OUTREACH DURING THE PANDEMIC WAS THEIR SERIES OF FREE SEASONAL SUFFOLK-THEMED COLORING AND ACTIVITY BOOKS. AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD OR IN PRINT, THEY OFFERED FUN LEARNING EXERCISES DESIGNED TO CREATE A VIRTUAL SUFFOLK VISITOR EXPERIENCE.

THEIR INCREASINGLY POPULAR MYSTERY AUTHORS FESTIVAL WAS A MAJOR SUCCESS AGAIN THIS YEAR, EVEN THOUGH HELD VIRTUALLY, ATTRACTING PEOPLE FROM NEAR AND FAR ALIKE.

TOURISM'S MUCH LOVED FARMERS' MARKET, GUIDED TOURS, EXCURSIONS, AND OTHER EVENTS, ARE WELCOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR CITIZENS TO ENJOY ALL THE SEASONS HAVE TO OFFER IN SUFFOLK.

WITH A MISSION STATEMENT TO "*CONNECT INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS TO INFORMATION, IDEAS, AND EXPERIENCES*", THE SUFFOLK PUBLIC LIBRARY DOES JUST THAT – AND MUCH MORE!

IN ADDITION TO ALL OF THEIR VIRTUAL CLASSES AND EVENTS THROUGH ONLINE MEETING PLATFORMS AND PLAYLISTS, THEY ALSO KICKED OFF THE *SEE YOU AT THE LIBRARY* INITIATIVE TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONNECT TO READING BY FINDING TITLES

THAT RELATE TO THEM IN IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES, AND BY EXPLORING DIVERSE TITLES THAT REFLECT OUR DIVERSE POPULATION IN SUFFOLK.

THE NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY PROJECT IS UNDERWAY, AND THE LIBRARY IS ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO **DREAM BIG** AND SHARE WHAT THEY WANT AND NEED IN A NEW LIBRARY IN DOWNTOWN SUFFOLK.

ALSO ENCOURAGING EVERYONE TO **DREAM BIG** IS THE SUFFOLK CENTER FOR CULTURAL ARTS. LET'S HEAR FROM THEIR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO, LORELEI COSTA

“MY IMPRESSION OF THE SUFFOLK ARTS COMMUNITY IS THAT IT'S AS DIVERSE AND VIBRANT AS SUFFOLK ITSELF. AND HERE AT THE SUFFOLK CENTER, I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE AND BLESSING OF MEETING SO MANY ARTISTS AND ART APPRECIATORS IN SUFFOLK AND BEYOND, RIGHT IN OUR WALLS. FROM THE YOUNG BALLERINAS WHO ARE TAKING CLASSES HERE, TO THE YOUNG SINGERS WHO WERE JUST ON OUR STEPS SINGING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, PEOPLE WHO LOVE AND COLLECT ART, PEOPLE WHO ARE TAKING PAINTING CLASSES, THE MUSICIANS ON OUR STAGE... AND I AM REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN WE CAN LAUGH TOGETHER, APPLAUD TOGETHER AND CHEER TOGETHER. AND THAT WILL HAPPEN HERE AT THE SUFFOLK CENTER.”

AS WE LIKE TO SAY, THE SUFFOLK CENTER FOR CULTURAL ARTS LITERALLY LIVES UP TO THE **COMMUNITY** OF A COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER.

TODAY, **TOGETHER**, WE'RE BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF A FISCALLY SOUND, INNOVATIVE, INCLUSIVE, THRIVING CITY – **SUFFOLK IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS!**

WHEN IT COMES TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, SUFFOLK ATTRACTS A DIVERSE MIX OF INDUSTRIES THANKS TO OUR PRIME MID-ATLANTIC LOCATION, ROOM FOR EXPANSION, AND PRO-BUSINESS CLIMATE.

WHEN TIMES GOT TOUGH, OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS REACHED OUT AND WORKED DIRECTLY WITH MANY OF OUR BUSINESSES, BOTH LARGE AND SMALL, AS WE LEARNED IN THE EARLIER VIDEO. WITH GREGORY BYRD AT THE HELM AS ACTING DIRECTOR OF HIS IMMENSELY TALENTED STAFF, THEY REMAIN COMMITTED TO PROVIDING UPDATED AND PERTINENT BUSINESS SUPPORT AND INFORMATION AS IT RELATES TO OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY NEEDS.

MANY BUSINESSES HELD ON AS LONG AS THEY COULD, KNOWING THAT TO SHUT DOWN MEANT LETTING GO OF LOYAL EMPLOYEES DURING A MOST DIFFICULT TIME. WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS FEDERAL AND LOCAL ASSISTANCE IN SOME CASES, THE MAJORITY OF THESE BUSINESSES WERE ABLE TO STAY OPEN AND KEEP PEOPLE ON THE JOB.

IN SPITE OF THE ALL TOO OBVIOUS CHALLENGES, CERTAINLY MUCH WAS ALSO GAINED OVER THIS LAST YEAR. SEEING THE CREATIVE WAYS BUSINESSES RESPONDED, WHILE HELPING THEIR NEIGHBORING BUSINESSES, TOO, GAVE US A SENSE OF THEIR SPIRIT AND DEDICATION.

RESTAURANTS WERE ESPECIALLY CHARGED WITH BEING CREATIVE, WITH MANY MAKING A SWITCH TO OFFERING CURBSIDE – PICKUP, TAKEOUT, OR EVEN DELIVERY. DOWNTOWN’S SUSHI AKA BEGAN OFFERING A SET-YOUR-OWN BUDGET PLATTER. NORTH SUFFOLK’S VINTAGE TAVERN SET UP INDIVIDUAL “IGLOO” TENTS SO DINERS COULD ENJOY A SAFE SETTING WHILE ENJOYING THE AMBIENCE OF STRING LIGHTS AND OUTDOOR DINING. SEVERAL EATERIES CREATED FAMILY-STYLE MEALS TO GO, ALONG WITH MIXED DRINKS, IN ORDER TO CONTINUE TO BE VIABLE DINING OPTIONS. OTHERS CREATED DRIVE-THROUGH FOOD DISTRIBUTION EVENTS, SOME AT NO COST, TO SERVE THOSE IN NEED.

BUSINESS RESPONSE WASN’T LIMITED TO RESTAURANTS, THOUGH. FOR EXAMPLE, KERMA MEDICAL PRODUCTS BEGAN DISTRIBUTING HAND SANITIZER TO CLINICS AND BUSINESSES WITH

DEMAND IN THE INITIAL STAGES OF THE PANDEMIC, WHICH WAS AT THE TIME AN EXTREMELY VALUABLE RESOURCE.

GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES, OR BIG BOXES FEATURING THAT EASILY RECOGNIZABLE AMAZON SMILE! THE **HUGE** NEWS OF COURSE IN 2020 WAS THE FACT THAT AMAZON IS BUILDING A \$230 MILLION, MULTISTORY ROBOTICS FULFILLMENT CENTER IN NORTHGATE COMMERCE PARK. AT 95 FEET AND FIVE STORIES TALL, THE FACILITY WILL BE THE STATES' LARGEST INDUSTRIAL BUILDING, AND SECOND IN OVERALL SIZE TO THE PENTAGON! MORE THAN A THOUSAND EMPLOYEES, WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH ROBOTS, WILL PICK, PACK, AND SHIP CUSTOMER ORDERS, INCLUDING BOOKS, HOME GOODS, AND ELECTRONICS.

LESS THAN TWO MILES AWAY, AMAZON IS ALSO INVESTING \$50 MILLION DOLLARS TO BUILD A 650,000-SQUARE-FOOT IMPORT PROCESSING CENTER IN CHESAPEAKE'S WESTERN BRANCH AREA. THESE DEALS EXEMPLIFY THE BENEFITS OF WORKING AS A REGION TO ATTRACT INDUSTRIES.

ALONG WITH THE AMAZON FULFILLMENT CENTER, WE'RE ALSO CONTINUING OUR RICH HISTORY WITH THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE PROCESSING MARKET, AS SUFFOLK WILL NOW BE HOME TO THE FIRST U.S. PRODUCTION FACILITY FOR INTERNATIONAL OLIVE OIL MANUFACTURER ACESUR USA LLC. THE SPANISH COMPANY PURCHASED AN 88,000-SQUARE-FOOT FACILITY IN SUFFOLK INDUSTRIAL PARK, CREATING 29 JOBS AND BRINGING OVER \$11 MILLION IN INVESTMENT. ACESUR HAS BEEN PRODUCING, PACKAGING, AND MARKETING OLIVE OIL SINCE 1840, AND IT EXPORTS TO MORE THAN 80 COUNTRIES. HERE, THEY'LL HANDLE THE BULK OF ITS OIL IMPORTS FROM ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA, AND SPAIN.

SUFFOLK'S INDUSTRIAL SECTOR GROWTH CONTINUES TO BOOM, AND IS LED BY MASSIMO ZANETTI BEVERAGE USA, ONE OF THE LARGEST VERTICALLY INTEGRATED COFFEE COMPANIES IN NORTH AMERICA. THEY ANNOUNCED LAST YEAR THAT THEY'RE INVESTING \$18.3 MILLION DOLLARS TO OPEN A NEW, STATE-OF-THE-ART DISTRIBUTION CENTER THAT WILL SUPPORT ITS CORPORATE

HEADQUARTERS AND MAIN ROASTING OPERATION, ALSO LOCATED IN SUFFOLK. THE NEW, ALMOST 356,000-SQUARE-FOOT DISTRIBUTION CENTER, WILL BE IN THE EQUUS CAPITAL PARTNERS' VIRGINIA PORT LOGISTICS PARK.

MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENTS – OR *MUDS*, AS THEY ARE CALLED IN THE INDUSTRY – ARE SEEN AS THE KEY TO REVITALIZATION. THEY NOT ONLY ENCOURAGE GROWTH WITHIN DENSE, MORE COMPACT AREAS OF LAND, THEY ALSO REDUCE TRAFFIC AND POLLUTION BY ALLOWING RESIDENTS TO USE THEIR CARS LESS AND CREATE PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS THANKS TO THE SHORT DISTANCES BETWEEN LIVING, WORK, COMMERCIAL, AND RECREATIONAL DESTINATIONS. BUSINESSES RESIDING IN THESE DEVELOPMENTS PROVIDE JOBS THAT CAN FUEL LOCAL ECONOMIC GROWTH AS EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES BECOME CUSTOMERS FOR LOCAL GROCERY STORES, RETAIL STORES, AND RESTAURANTS.

ONE SUCH EXAMPLE IS BRIDGEPORT. *THE 3800 ACQUA APARTMENTS* ARE CURRENTLY 100% OCCUPIED ACROSS 291 LUXURY RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT UNITS. GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL AND SITE TENANTS FOR NEW AND SOON TO OPEN BUSINESSES INCLUDE AMEDEO'S RISTORANTE & BAKERY – *ANOTHER OF BRIAN AND TERESA MULLINS'*, OWNERS OF *M&M HOSPITALITY* – EXQUISITE ADDITIONS TO THEIR ROSTER OF RESTAURANTS THAT CONTINUES TO RAISE THE CUISINE AND ENTERTAINMENT BAR. THEIR NEWEST CULINARY OPTION COMPLEMENTS VINTAGE TAVERN, RIVERSTONE CHOPHOUSE, DECOY'S SEAFOOD, AND BENNETT'S CREEK MARINA. NAMED IN HONOR OF PLANTER'S PEANUTS FOUNDER AMEDEO OBICI, THE NEW RESTAURANT IS OPEN FOR LUNCH AND DINNER DAILY AND ALSO HAS A PRIVATE DINING AREA AND A MENU THAT BOASTS OF A WIDE VARIETY OF NORTHERN ITALIAN CUISINE FROM OBICI'S HOMETLAND OF ODERZO, ITALY, AND HIS OLD FAMILY RECIPIES.

ADDITIONAL BRIDGEPORT NORTH SUFFOLK OFFERINGS INCLUDE ORANGETHEORY FITNESS, FIN & TONIC, KNOTTS COFFEE COMPANY, 7-ELEVEN, BLUE HIPPO CAR WASH, BREEZE DENTAL, SALON ON POINTE, EDWARD JONES INVESTMENTS, LA PARILLA

MEXICAN GRILL, AND COMING LATER THIS SUMMER, VIRGINIA'S DAUGHTER BRIDAL BOUTIQUE.

THEY'VE ALSO STARTED PHASE 2, *THE ROYAL SAIL APARTMENTS*, WHICH WILL DELIVER ADDITIONAL FIRST FLOOR MEDICAL/OFFICE/RETAIL SPACE AND AN ADDITIONAL 159 APARTMENT UNITS TO OPEN LATER THIS YEAR. PHASE 3 WILL FEATURE 288 ADDITIONAL APARTMENTS AND A TWO-STORY PARKING GARAGE.

THE POINT AT HARBOUR VIEW, A SUFFOLK ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY-OWNED ENDEAVOR, IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE EFFECTIVE *MUD* CONCEPT. THIS MAJOR 55-ACRE SITE OFF OF INTERSTATE 664 IS LOCATED IN HARBOUR VIEW AND SERVES AS THE GATEWAY TO THE AMAZING 300-ACRE FORMER TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE SITE THAT SITS ON THE JAMES RIVER. THE EDA IS WORKING WITH GEE'S PARTNERS, AND PROGRESS IS ONGOING AT THIS EXTRAORDINARY, ONE-OF-A-KIND OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT.

NOW UNDERWAY IS *THE AURA AT HARBOUR VIEW*, BY BONAVENTURE, WHICH INCLUDES 300 LUXURY APARTMENT UNITS, TOWNHOMES AND THE FIRST RETAIL BUILDING PLAN TO START CONSTRUCTION THIS SUMMER, WHILE DIRT CONTINUES TO BE TURNED IN PREPARATION FOR INFRASTRUCTURE.

CITY COUNCIL PREVIOUSLY APPROVED FUNDING FOR THE ENGINEERING OF THE 1.3 MILES OF SHORELINE IN ORDER TO PROTECT THIS IRREPLACEABLE ASSET FROM EROSION AS WE PLAN FOR A FUTURE PUBLIC SPACE THAT WILL EVENTUALLY SPAN THE LENGTH OF THE ENTIRE WATERFRONT.

DOWNTOWN'S *PEANUT CROSSING* – WHO WE HEARD ABOUT EARLIER, IS ANOTHER GREAT EXAMPLE OF HOW MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENTS ENCOURAGE HIGH-QUALITY DESIGN AND GREATER FLEXIBILITY.

DUE IN PART TO THIS PROJECT, THE ORLANDO – PLEASANT HILL AREA OF DOWNTOWN SUFFOLK WILL ALSO BE SEEING NEW COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY. GOODMAN DEVELOPERS, INC. HAS

ANNOUNCED PLANS TO TURN A VACANT GROUP OF PARCELS INTO A BUSTLING MIX OF USES, TO INCLUDE A CONVENIENCE STORE WITH A UNIQUE CONCEPT, RESIDENTIAL HOMES, SHOPS, AND RESTAURANTS. EPHRAIM GOODMAN, OF GOODMAN DEVELOPERS, GREW UP STEPS AWAYS FROM THE FUTURE PROJECT, AND IS EXCITED TO HAVE “COME HOME” TO SEE THIS REDEVELOPMENT BE BORN AND GROWN. CONSTRUCTION ON PHASE 1 IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY.

WALL STREET CAFÉ HAS JOINED THE VIBRANT DOWNTOWN SUFFOLK COMMUNITY AS NOT ONLY THE NEWEST COFFEE SHOP, BUT ALSO AS A BREAKFAST AND LUNCH SPOT AND PLACE TO CONDUCT WORK AT ONE OF THEIR CONVENIENT, WI-FI COMPUTER STATIONS. THE BUSINESS PARTNERS COMPLETELY RENOVATED THE BUILDING AT 118 WEST WASHINGTON STREET, WITH DÉCOR TO MATCH THE HOMAGE TO DIVERSITY IN FINANCE AND REVERENCE TO SUFFOLK’S HISTORIC ROOTS.

*AS WE CONCLUDE THIS COMPREHENSIVE VIDEO HIGHLIGHT, IT’S EVIDENT THAT BY WORKING **TOGETHER** AND FOCUSING ON **OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL**, SUFFOLK’S INCREASED ECONOMIC INVESTMENT FROM THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR CONTINUE TO MOVE OUR ENTIRE CITY **FORWARD**.*

(MAYOR DUMAN RESUMES REMARKS)

AS WE’VE SEEN, EVEN IN THE FACE OF PERCEIVED INSURMOUNTABLE AND IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGES, SUFFOLK’S IRREPRESSIBLE AND RESILIENT HEALTHCARE HEROES, FIRST RESPONDERS, CITIZENS, AND BUSINESSES **TOGETHER** HAVE FOUND A PATH **FORWARD**. WE’RE A CITY FULL OF OPPORTUNITY EVEN IN THE TOUGHEST OF TIMES.

CONSUMER SPENDING ON RETAIL GOODS DRIVES MUCH OF THE OVERALL ECONOMY, AND THE RETAIL SECTOR EMPLOYS A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE. WHILE IT PROBABLY WAS BY NO MEANS EASY, AN IMPRESSIVE NUMBER OF RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS MADE GREAT STRIDES IN 2020. AS SEEN IN THIS YEAR’S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY REPORT, PROUDLY MAKING ITS OFFICIAL DEBUT TODAY IN YOUR GIFT BAGS AND ONLINE, **OVER 45**

RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS IN SUFFOLK EXPANDED OR OPENED DURING THE YEAR, ADDING 287 NEW JOBS, AND IMPACTING ALMOST 250,000-SQUARE-FEET OF COMMERCIAL SPACE.

IN CALENDAR YEAR 2020, WHICH INCLUDES THOSE FIGURES JUST STATED, WE SAW A TOTAL OF OVER **\$84.4 MILLION DOLLARS IN CAPITAL INVESTMENT, 475 NEW JOBS CREATED, AND OVER 766,000 SQUARE-FEET IMPACTED.**

LOOKING BACK AT CALENDAR YEAR 2019 – WHILE IT MAY SEEM LIKE *SEVERAL YEARS AGO* – WE SHOULD NOT LET THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IN 2020 SHROUD THE PREVIOUS YEAR’S SUCCESSES. TURNING BACK THE CLOCK, WE SAW A YEAR OF GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS, INCLUDING A TOTAL OF **2,530 NEW JOBS, OVER 4.5 MILLION-SQUARE-FEET IMPACTED, AND JUST SHORT OF \$319-MILLION DOLLARS IN CAPITAL INVESTMENT.** *IN SUFFOLK, WE KEEP MOVING FORWARD AND ONLY LOOK BACK TO SEE HOW FAR WE’VE COME.*

I JUST RECEIVED THE CITY’S THIRD QUARTER REVENUE PROJECTIONS. AS COMPARED TO BUDGET ESTIMATES, PERSONAL PROPERTY IS UP 10%; SALES AND USE TAX UP 36%; BUSINESS LICENSE TAX UP 12%; RECORDATION TAX UP 29%; LODGING TAX UP 47%; AND EVEN MEALS TAX IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC UP 8%.

IMPRESSIVE NUMBERS THAT INDICATE A STRONG ECONOMY POSITIONED FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND PROSPERITY.

I’M A SELF-PROCLAIMED “NUMBERS PERSON”, BUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER IS THAT BEHIND THESE IMPRESSIVE NUMBERS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS ARE **REAL PEOPLE**. EVERY JOB THAT WE CREATE, EVERY STATISTIC THAT WE TALK ABOUT – THESE ARE NOT JUST NUMBERS ON A PAGE. ***THESE REPRESENT REAL PEOPLE, WITH REAL DREAMS, AND REAL FAMILIES TO SUPPORT.***

WHILE SO MUCH REMAINS TO BE SEEN, AND ALTHOUGH 2020 MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE YEAR THAT WE ALL ENVISIONED, WE CAN ALL LOOK BACK TOGETHER AND BE IMMENSELY – *AND RIGHTFULLY* – PROUD. OUR SUCCESS IS ALWAYS SHARED, AND IS ALWAYS THE

RESULT OF COLLABORATION. SUFFOLK WILL REMAIN FOCUSED ON ATTRACTING AND RETAINING WHAT MAKES IT SUCH A REMARKABLE COMMUNITY. **WE'VE GOT SO MUCH TO LOOK FORWARD TO!**

AND SPEAKING OF SOMETHING TO **LOOK FORWARD TO**, IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE THIS AFTERNOON TO SHARE WITH YOU A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

GOGREEN FARMS AND GREENHOUSES, A LOCALLY FOUNDED AND OPERATED FOOD DISTRIBUTION COMPANY, WILL BE EXPANDING ITS OPERATIONS TO SUFFOLK'S VIRGINIA REGIONAL COMMERCE PARK.

GOGREEN FARMS HAS CREATED A SPECIAL POSITION WITHIN HAMPTON ROADS BY PUTTING FRESH PRODUCE FROM VIRGINIA FARMS ON THE MENU FOR STUDENTS THROUGH A NUMBER OF HAMPTON ROADS SCHOOL SYSTEMS. GOGREEN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NUMEROUS VIRGINIA FARMS HAS ALLOWED THEM TO INCREASE CREATIVE AND FRESH OFFERINGS TO NOW EIGHT SEPARATE SCHOOLS SYSTEMS, AND OVER TWO-HUNDRED SCHOOLS IN AND AROUND HAMPTON ROADS. THEY WILL STORE, PACKAGE, AND DISTRIBUTE FRUITS, VEGETABLES, EGGS, DAIRY, PACKAGED SNACKS, AND VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS IN THEIR NEW, 70,000-SQUARE-FOOT OPERATION LOCATED IN SUFFOLK.

I'M ESPECIALLY PROUD TO SHARE THAT GOGREEN'S FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, BREON CLEMONS, IS A SUFFOLK NATIVE AND A 2006 NANSEMOND RIVER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE.

I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MORE EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS FROM SUFFOLK THROUGHOUT THE REST OF 2021.

I'D ALSO LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK THE BACKBONE OF OUR COMMUNITY – *OUR SMALL BUSINESSES* – FOR THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT. LET'S DO ALL WE CAN TO **“LOVE LOCAL, BUY SUFFOLK”**. WHEN YOU BUY FROM A SMALL BUSINESS, YOU ARE SUPPORTING YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND NEIGHBORS.

THESE LOCAL BUSINESSES ADD CHARACTER TO OUR CITY, STRENGTHEN OUR ECONOMY, AND PROMOTE FUTURE GROWTH. IN ADDITION, OUR TAX DOLLARS STAY LOCAL AND HELP SUPPORT SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND LOCAL SERVICES.

AS WE CONTINUE TO RECOVER AND ADAPT, WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY THE SENSE OF COMMON PURPOSE, UNDERSTANDING, AND COMPASSION WE'VE SHARED OVER THIS LAST YEAR FORWARD.

OUR THEME FOR THIS EVENT HAS BEEN, ***TOGETHER...WE'RE MOVING FORWARD.***

WE HAVE HIGHLIGHTED OUR CITY'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FINANCIAL STABILITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH, DIVERSITY, AND VAST RESOURCES THAT CREATE A POSITIVE OUTLOOK MAKING OUR CITY THE ENVY OF HAMPTON ROADS.

MOVING FORWARD, WE MUST NOT REST ON OUR LAURELS. WE MUST BE WILLING TO ACKNOWLEDGE ISSUES AND OUR CITIZEN'S CONCERNS. WE MUST CONTINUE TO OPEN MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, *LISTEN*.

ERIC LEAMAN SAID IT BEST; "*LISTENING IS NOT JUST HEARING. HEARING REFERS TO SOUNDS, AND ALL YOU NEED IS EARS FOR THAT. LISTENING MEANS USING YOUR EYES, YOUR EARS, AND YOUR BRAIN!*".

MOVING FORWARD, WE MUST CONTINUE TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY, EQUALITY, AND DIVERSITY.

MOVING FORWARD, WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT IT IS EVERYONE'S DESIRE TO LIVE IN A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND HOPEFUL COMMUNITY. TO THAT END, AMONG OTHER INITIATIVES, I AM PARTICIPATING WITH THE OTHER HAMPTON ROADS MAYORS IN WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO ADDRESS AND REDUCE VIOLENCE, ESPECIALLY AMONG OUR YOUTH.

MOVING FORWARD, WE MUST CONTINUE TO PROMOTE AND REINFORCE THE RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL RESPECT ENJOYED BY OUR CITIZENS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL.

WE MUST CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL BY ADOPTING THOUGHTFUL, EFFECTIVE REFORMS, WHILE ALSO EASING THE BURDEN THAT WEIGHS HEAVILY ON OUR OFFICER'S SHOULDERS.

AND WHEN IT COMES TO COVID-19, I HOPE EVERYONE WILL MAKE THE DECISION TO GET VACCINATED. ***IT'S OUR BEST SHOT AT GETTING BACK TOGETHER AND RETURNING TO NORMALCY.***

I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DIDN'T TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK MS. DIANA KLINK, DIRECTOR OF MEDIA & COMMUNITY RELATIONS, AND HER STAFF FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND PROFESSIONALISM IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS EVENT. IN ADDITION, I'D LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO REVEREND DIGGS, THE NANSEMOND RIVER HIGH SCHOOL BELLA VOCE CHORUS, AND ALL THOSE WHO GRACIOUSLY PARTICIPATED.

FROM MY VERY FIRST DAYS ON CITY COUNCIL, I'VE ENDED MY REMARKS PORTION OF EACH CITY COUNCIL MEETING WITH A QUOTE, AND TODAY'S STATE OF THE CITY EVENT IS NO DIFFERENT. IN CLOSING, KEEP IN MIND THIS QUOTE FROM MAHATMA GANDHI AS WE MOVE *FORWARD*:

*"KEEP YOUR THOUGHTS POSITIVE, BECAUSE YOUR THOUGHTS BECOME **YOUR WORDS.***

*KEEP YOUR WORDS POSITIVE, BECAUSE YOUR WORDS BECOME **YOUR BEHAVIOR.***

*KEEP YOUR BEHAVIOR POSITIVE, BECAUSE YOUR BEHAVIOR BECOMES **YOUR HABITS.***

*KEEP YOUR HABITS POSITIVE, BECAUSE YOUR HABITS BECOME **YOUR VALUES.***

*KEEP YOUR VALUES POSITIVE, BECAUSE YOUR VALUES BECOME **YOUR DESTINY.**"*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME TODAY. TO OUR CITIZENS,
*I THANK YOU FOR THE TRUST YOU HAVE PLACED IN ME, AND FOR
THE HONOR OF BEING YOUR MAYOR.*