

**State of the City 2018**  
Mayor Eddie W. DeLoach

My fellow Council members, elected officials, Mr. City Manager, and most importantly, my fellow citizens, welcome to the 2018 State of the City address. Since I stood before you last year, our city has seen her fair share of successes and challenges. I am proud to say we have met each challenge laid before us. The State of our City is strong, and continues to grow stronger daily. We will continue to move as one city in one direction, and that is forward.

Through a series of town halls and neighborhood meetings, Council has used the information collected to approve and with the direction of the City Manager start to implement the first strategic plan in a generation for the City of Savannah. It is known as Savannah Forward, because it will do just that, move Savannah forward. This is not a plan that will sit on a shelf and collect dust. This is an active plan that has already lead to the re-organization of city staff, and shifting of budget priorities. The Savannah Forward plan calls for five strategic initiatives including Public Safety, Infrastructure, Neighborhood Revitalization, Economic Strength & Poverty Reduction, and Good Government. We will accomplish the goals set forth in this plan, which will lead to a better Savannah for all. I will lay out many of these goals in the speech before you.

A little over two years ago, when I started my campaign for Mayor, the issue that propelled me into the race was crime, and today public safety remains my number one priority and focus. This Council has devoted the resources necessary to start seeing a significant reduction in crime. I am proud to report that violent crime in the city is down by seven percent, and the murder rate has fallen over thirty percent in the last year alone. These are great strides in crime reduction, but only just the start. It is important that we stay focused. We must continue to make sure the Savannah Police Department has the tools and resources they need to continue their mission to eliminate crime. We all know one crime, is one crime too many.

There are a couple of initiatives that have helped improve public safety, community policing, and the End Gun Violence program.

This past summer, Council was forced to make the tough decision and reinstitute the Savannah Police Department. The creation of the SPD allowed the City to focus all of our efforts and resources on a smaller more compact area. This allowed the SPD to expand our commitment to community policing. Community policing's key component is helping our citizens know that they can trust and build a relationship with our officers. This in turn will help our officers if there is a need to find out information, and provide help to one of our neighbors.

The End Gun Violence program is a tool the SPD uses to fight gang and group violence. With the help of the advisory council, the District Attorney, the FBI, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the ATF, and many others, we will stay laser focused on these activities. We will bring the full force of the law to bear down on these gang members and give them the option to help and improve their life, or spend significant time behind bars.

Our numbers reflect a strong police department. In 2018, the Council fully funded the recommendations from the Berkshire Study. This included having a seven-minute response time jurisdiction wide for all violent crimes. We funded additional officers, updated training and equipment, opened and are building new police precincts, and opened a cold case unit to help close those cases that continue to haunt many of our families in the Savannah area.

While Council has been working hard to implement this progress, the City Manager has started the search for a new chief for our Police Department. We are fortunate to have Chief Mark Revenew step in for the short term. I see no reason for the SPD to miss a beat under his steady leadership.

While we continue to work day and night to see crime reduced in our community, our officers will not rest as long as there is a mother crying at night because she has lost her son or daughter, a woman scared to leave home because

she has been a victim of sexual violence, or a teacher worried about a student because she feels they are victims of child abuse or bullying.

We must provide our youth with a pathway forward out of poverty and crime. We must show them there is hope. We must show them there is a brighter future, and we do that by providing them with the option of summer camps and employment. They must realize that no matter what their present circumstance, those events and circumstances do not define their future.

This year the City of Savannah, in partnership with the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System, launched the Summer 100 program. I was proud to help play a part in the creation of this program with SCCPS Chief Terry Enoch. The Summer 100 program provided scholarships to 100 underprivileged youths in our community so they could attend a summer camp put on by our school system. These camps included sports, spending time with public safety officials, as well as science and math summer enrichment. These provided our youth, not quite old enough for summer employment, with a way to grow and stay entertained during the summer.

The Summer 500 program has seen great success. Including over a \$2,000,000 invested in our youth by the private sector. Once again, this summer our rising juniors and seniors in high school will be able to apply for jobs in the Summer 500 program. Last summer, we were able to expand, and grow the

Summer 500 program to over 350 students, and over 100 private sector employers. The Summer 500 students continue to receive a week's worth of soft and job skills training before they are sent to their jobs. These jobs are providing our youth with not just work experience, but a paycheck and life skills for the future. They lead to experiences and the first line on a resume. I often remind the students that where you start is not where you end. I started out washing cars, and moved on to working as a carpenter before graduating from college, then into fertilizer sales for Kaiser, and finally starting my own business and becoming Mayor of Savannah. Each one of these jobs helped lead me to the success I have today.

I ask each and every business owner today to think about hiring an intern. Give a student a chance to learn a skill, and invest in their future. We cannot let the circumstances of today get in the way of their bright future of tomorrow. We must provide students an opportunity to reach their full potential.

These two programs are just an example of the many summer programs the city offers to our youth. With all the programs, combined Savannah has seen a drop in youth crime by 27% during the summer months in 2017.

Savannah is faced with too many citizens who do not see a way forward. Those that have made mistakes, but served their time and now need a little help to stand on their own. We must help these citizens become productive members of society. I know, from my own experience of employing returning citizens that

given the opportunity these men and women want to succeed, and can succeed. They deserve this second chance to provide for themselves, and their families. And we must help find ways to provide it to them. They want a hand up, not a hand out. Recently I met with a group of concerned ministers about the issues that face our city, including crime. These ministers, along with me, know that too many people are forced into crime because of a lack of hope. I am proud to work with the ministers, and know that we can give our citizens the hope they need to work their way out of poverty. That is why on February 20 in the arena of the Civic Center, we will be hosting a job fair, where over 80 businesses will be participating. All of these businesses are currently hiring.

We will have representation there from many segments of the economy, which include manufacturing, hospitality, our unions, and construction to just name a few. We will also be providing soft skills training with our partners before and after the Jobs Fair, including this Thursday and Friday at the Civic Center. We must provide these citizens with every tool possible, including classes on resume writing, soft skills, how to dress for an interview, and even how to get items expunged from their record. I encourage everyone here to please go to the city website [www.SavannahGa.gov/SavannahJobFair](http://www.SavannahGa.gov/SavannahJobFair) to learn more, and to pre-register for the soft skills training. Our commitment to you is to help break the cycle of

poverty, so you can proudly use your skills to earn a living wage and provide for your family.

The ability of our citizens, to earn that living wage, for the student to be able to find that summer job, is providing our citizens with economic empowerment to better provide for their future and is a key tenant of the Savannah Forward plan.

The City has not funded significant improvements to our neighborhoods since Mayor Floyd Adams funded the Cuyler-Brownville Revitalization in 1994. Last year, as I stood here I announced an ambitious plan for the Savannah Shines Campaign. I am pleased to report staff has selected the Edgemere-Sackville neighborhood to be the first area to receive a strong infusion of city resources. As part of the Savannah Shines campaign, we are working with the neighborhood association, residents, property owners, and the private sector to seek improvements to both public and private property. The City plans to spend and leverage \$1.6 million during a 12 to 18 month period to build new sidewalks and bike paths, improve public safety, build new parks and playgrounds, and so much more, though engaging the neighborhood residents. We have already had one neighborhood cleanup day, and it was great to see how the residents have embraced this program, and residents have embraced these improvements.

To improve the quality of life for all citizens in the fourth and sixth districts, Council has worked with the Neighborhood Associations to develop some much-

needed parks, and green space for the Windsor Forest, Parkside and Paradise Park Neighborhoods that will help all of the citizens of those districts, and the city.

This Council has also approved \$500,000 to finish the Waters Avenue revitalization plan, in the Second District. Currently, with the tax initiative for businesses development in the area, it will lead to new economic activities for this vital corridor, as well as the areas that surround Waters Avenue.

All of these improvements are great, but the one thing all of council felt needed improvements was the appearance of our ditches, medians, and right of ways. The City had sadly let many of our areas of responsibilities become over grown with grass and weeds during the summer months. Council felt the city needed to set the example for our citizens, and because of that, this council has invested over \$1,000,000 additional dollars in the 2018 budget for landscape maintenance and improvements. Our citizens need to be proud and should want to show off the quality of our public spaces. They cannot be proud if the grass and weeds are over grown. While our city staff did the best with the resources provided, we must take it to the next level. We must have gateway entrances to the city that are as grand as our city.

The City will also begin to move on the much-anticipated new Arena and Canal District. This City made a promise to our residents that we would build this project, and with the creation of the position of the Canal District Director, we are



committed to seeing dirt turned, and this project started in the next 12 months. Our citizens will also begin to see infrastructure and other improvements to the area to be ready for the new arena. This includes expanding and widening West Gwinnett Street and turning it into a grand boulevard with a beautifully landscaped median.

The City is also continuing to invest in many drainage improvements all over the city. The city will be completing the expansion of the Bilbo Canal, and will begin work on Casey Canal II and Springfield Canal project to bring some much-needed relief to district four and five residents. Our citizens know how important these drainage projects are, especially in the last two years with hurricanes Matthew and Irma.

Council and city staff is constantly lobbying our federal and state leaders to help provide the necessary funding, and support for projects like the Savannah Harbor Deeping project, and Project DeRenne. These projects are vital to the growth of our city, and we will fight government red tape at every corner to get them accomplished.

The City has been focusing on increasing community policing, summer programs for our youth, and increased blight reduction, because of our high crime and generational poverty. Because the City has been focused on the immediate problems, and not the root cause of these issues very little has changed. High poverty should be the exception and not the norm. I am committing my

administration to focusing not just on the immediate need, but the root cause of poverty for the next two years, with a focus on early childhood education.

While we must continue to work to help those find jobs, and continue to invest in job training skills for our youth. It is time for the city to look deeper, and figure out how to address these issues, before they become problems. I often think of what my mom, Virginia DeLoach, has told me on many occasions that the younger we are able to reach a child; the better chance you and they have to succeed. She knows this from being a lifelong teacher, and Principal. That is why Savannah is fortunate to have Superintendent Anne Levett, because she knows this, and has been working to make this dream a reality. I know that by working with Dr. Levett and the school system we can achieve what was once thought impossible, an Early Childhood Education Facility. There is no reason the City, school system, and the private sector cannot come together to make the Savannah Renaissance Plan a reality. When we work together, greatness will come. The plan calls for the creation of a school for three to five year olds, which includes the entire wrap around services a family needs to ensure their child receives the best education. What neighborhood you were born into, or how much money your parents make, should not be a barrier for you to receive the best education possible. We can make this a reality, and we will, but I need your help to fight the status

quo. It is a new idea, and I know it scares people. Yes, it will not be easy, but no great challenge ever is.

I have laid before you an ambitious plan for the next two years, and I can assure you that I, the Council, the City Manager, and all of the city staff are committed to delivering results. **We will** have results, and we will see Savannah become the city she deserves to be. **We can** be the beacon of light, and hope when everyone comes together to achieve this dream. **We are one city, moving in one direction, and that is forward.**

Thank you for coming tonight. Thank you for caring about our city, Savannah. God bless you and God bless the City of Savannah.