

2025 State of the County Address
One Gwinnett – Chairwoman Nicole Love Hendrickson
As prepared for delivery on March 6, 2025

Good morning, Gwinnett! It's truly an honor to stand before you today.

I want to start by sharing my heartfelt gratitude to the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce, the Council for Quality Growth, and 12Stone Church for hosting my 5th State of the County Address. And what a welcome from the South Gwinnett High School Drumline!

Thank you all for being here.

I also want to recognize my colleagues on the Board of Commissioners — thank you for your partnership and collaboration over this past year.

To our County Administrator Glenn Stephens and the leadership team, thank you for your steadfast support and initiative.

To my family, this journey would not be the same without your unwavering support and presence by my side.

As I look out into this audience — at the leaders, the partners, the residents who make Gwinnett what it is — I'm reminded of one simple truth: we are strongest when we stand together.

Serving as Chairwoman of this incredible county is not just a position — it's a responsibility, a privilege, and a promise. A promise to continue fostering a community where every voice matters, every opportunity is within reach, and every person regardless of background, belief, or circumstance can call this place home.

We're at a defining moment.

Across the country, we see efforts to divide and diminish the very values that make us strong: diversity, inclusion, and shared prosperity.

But here in Gwinnett, we choose a different path. We choose to move forward as one.

Together, the four district commissioners and I have one great shared responsibility: leading this county forward. We keep with us a sense of stability and a unified vision that ensures Gwinnett remains a shining example of progress, collaboration, and innovation.

Every voice – every contribution – vibrantly connects our county.

You can search all over the world and you'll find there is no community like Gwinnett.

And as we reflect on our journey and envision the road ahead, a word keeps coming to mind: one. One is a beginning. One is unique. One is focused. One is uniting.

And for Gwinnett, one means something for us too.

We are one county. One million strong. A county that works for everyone. A place where one business idea can become a phenomenon. Where no two neighborhoods are alike, but *each* one is safe and connected. Where one thread weaves together a diverse community. And when we're united, we are unstoppable.

With one community, one purpose, and one future: we are One Gwinnett.

Every day, there are countless stories that define who we are as One Gwinnett — stories of resilience, connection, and collaboration.

This January, Gwinnett faced a winter storm unlike any we've seen in years.

Now, we all know that in Georgia, snow is like an unexpected guest. It shows up uninvited, throws everything into chaos, and before we can figure out what to do, it's gone the next day!

But this time, it wasn't just a dusting. Ice blanketed the roads, temperatures plunged, and concern set in. But our county government didn't hesitate. We rose to the challenge, together.

In less than 24 hours, Police officers responded to nearly eighteen hundred calls. Firefighters teamed up with crews from Water Resources to reach stranded residents. Transportation teams worked tirelessly to clear roads for emergency vehicles. In our Emergency Operations Center, call takers answered nearly four times their usual volume, coordinating real-time responses across the county.

And then, one call changed everything. A gas leak at an apartment complex. Families in danger. Freezing temperatures looming.

Without hesitation, our county teams sprang into action, mitigating the threat and ensuring families quickly relocated to warming stations. What could have brought our county to a standstill only strengthened our resolve.

This moment demonstrated the power of one community, standing together. That's the spirit that defines us – not just in times of crisis but in our everyday commitment to one another. Because when one person calls for help, we answer. When one neighborhood is in need, we rally. When one challenge arises, we face it as One Gwinnett.

That is who we are. That is the power of one.

The state of our county is strong, and our future is even brighter.

Gwinnett continues to thrive as a dynamic, diverse, and forward-looking community built on a foundation of sound governance and strategic investments.

At the core of our accomplishments is our long-standing AAA/Aaa bond rating, which we have enjoyed since 1997. All three credit-rating agencies – Moody's, Fitch, and S&P Global – have all cited our ability to maintain healthy reserves, low pension liabilities, and our budgeting practices that surpass our state and national peers.

Additionally, our solid economic base and a well-educated, growing population were noted as further strengths that led to the highest rating possible. This strong financial stability gives us the tools to attract top-tier employers and partners. Let me give you an example.

This past summer, Souto Foods — a local food supplier specializing in high-quality products from Latin America and the Caribbean – announced plans to invest 28 million dollars and hire 70 new positions in Gwinnett County.

This significant expansion will kickstart the redevelopment of the underutilized former Cisco Corporate Campus. The collaboration between our Economic Development team and Partnership Gwinnett led to 19 projects that generated 1600 new jobs with 275 million dollars in new capital investment.

As a maturing county, we're shifting toward revitalizing areas that not only strengthen and grow our tax base but catalyze equitable economic growth that benefits our communities.

We're putting our community to work while thinking about how these developments can work for our community, and as we envision and re-envision our county growth, one thing stands out.

People want to live in a thriving community, where they feel comfortable and safe.

As part of our commitment to cultivating a strong, resilient community, the county has invested in public safety enhancements, including cutting-edge technology to support our police.

At Gwinnett's Situational Awareness and Crime Response Center, staff analyze and provide critical intelligence to officers using real-time data from strategically placed Flock cameras. In 2024 alone, this center played a key role in helping police make 246 arrests, recover 76 stolen vehicles, and locate 12 missing people. State-of-the-art technology like this is making a real difference in combatting crime.

Through a combination of innovative policing and integrated technology, crime in Gwinnett remains low across all categories. In fact, compared to the national average

for crime rates in counties, Gwinnett County is in the 88th percentile for safety – which means Gwinnett is safer than 88% of counties across America.

And we continue to implement innovative public safety solutions with our community in mind. New this year, we're introducing community service aides to enhance support for our police department. This new position will handle functions like road closures, abandoned vehicles, and missing person searches that don't require a sworn officer. By taking on these responsibilities, they will free up our officers to respond more quickly to urgent calls and critical incidents.

This role can serve as a valuable pathway for those interested in a law enforcement career, offering hands-on experience and a potential entry point into the profession. This initiative is a win-win for both public safety and workforce development in our county.

These are significant achievements that enhance our community's safety, efficiency, and future growth, but protecting our community starts with supporting health and well-being.

Frederick Douglass once said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

That's why Gwinnett is committed to making holistic health resources accessible for all.

For years, we've joined forces with key partners to provide mental health, public health, early learning services, and more at our OneStop Centers — and to better reflect their mission and impact, we've renamed these facilities Community Resource Centers. Because that's exactly what they are: a place where residents — including our veterans — are connected to much needed services, support, and guidance.

In just a few days, the county will break ground on the new Gwinnett Community Resource Center at Grayson Highway. This center will be the home to Gwinnett's first-ever Behavioral Health Crisis Stabilization Unit – a facility dedicated to supporting individuals in crisis. By integrating exceptional mental health care from View Point Health, this initiative fills a critical gap in our community, providing timely intervention and compassionate care for those who need it most. But beyond offering these vital services, we must also make sure people can reach them.

Mobility remains top of mind for our county leadership. We've made significant investments in transportation solutions that connect our communities, ensuring that no one is left behind because they lack reliable transportation.

Though last year's referendum failed, research we conducted after the vote showed broad support for many of the initiatives outlined in the transit plan, like the airport ride and microtransit.

We've seen firsthand how our microtransit service puts medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other errands within reach for our residents who rely on transit.

This past year, we expanded microtransit to Norcross and the Gateway 85 Community Improvement District – a welcome addition to that community.

And there's much more we can do that makes our one community one ride away from being more accessible.

According to the Atlanta Regional Commission, Gwinnett is poised to add nearly a quarter million residents in the next 25 years, which means we must create solutions to ease congestion.

Our transit plan will continue to be our guiding framework as we strive to enhance safety, reliability, and roadway experience. Congestion is not an issue we will leave to become a bigger problem for future generations. While we hope to create smoother commutes, this is really about moving our community forward with stronger pathways to opportunity because when people can get where they need to go, businesses thrive, workers grow, and innovation takes off.

And that's exactly what's happening in Gwinnett.

As we build and improve infrastructure, businesses — big and small — find success, and our next generation is empowered to lead. And when we talk about opportunities and the next generation, the faces of our youth spring to mind.

Through options like the County's Empower Gwinnett summer internship program, young people are already making a difference in our county – many of whom are experiencing their first full-time job and discovering the world of public service. For them, it's more than just work – it's an invaluable opportunity to build connections, gain skills, and develop professionally.

And with more than 33,000 businesses, Gwinnett is an incredible place to grow your career. As we champion business and strengthen our workforce, the County continues to build partnerships through everyday touchpoints and special events like our G20 Summit with Gwinnett's 20 largest employers.

Our dedicated workforce development team is actively engaging with employers, like Gwinnett County Public Schools, Northside Gwinnett, and Publix, to name a few. By partnering closely with businesses and industry leaders, we ensure that our education and training initiatives align with current and future market trends. This approach creates opportunities not only for the next generation but for workers of all ages and backgrounds who want to grow their careers right here in Gwinnett. By investing in their potential today, we are building the foundation for a stronger, more unified tomorrow.

Opportunity is most powerful when it's open to everyone.

In Gwinnett, our strength comes from ensuring every person has the chance to contribute, succeed, and belong. But there's something even more essential to building one community: celebrating and connecting through our vibrant differences.

Separately, they're beautiful. Together, they're life changing.

In 2024, Gwinnett County was named the number one most diverse county in the United States. This recognition is a reflection of our core belief: we thrive as One Gwinnett.

Diversity is more than a unique feature of our county; it's a fundamental strength. Equity is not optional – it is essential. We are not slowing down, scaling back, or compromising on our commitment to fairness and inclusion. We are pushing forward and ensuring that every decision we make reflects our values. Because true progress happens when everyone has a fair shot, and we will accept nothing less.

Building One Gwinnett where people are welcome to be their authentic selves isn't something that just happens. It takes intention. Like expanding our nondiscrimination ordinance to strengthen protections for all or holding events like our Multicultural Festival that celebrates the bonds that unite us.

We don't have standalone initiatives just to check boxes. We listen to all the voices of our residents and neighbors. And we embrace shared experiences that are both unique and familiar.

I emphasize we. Not just me. Not just you.

We recognize that every decision we make affects real people, real families, and real futures. This also translates to how we do business.

In a community that spans cultures, languages, races, and ages, we must be intentional about how government can foster and champion businesses — especially those that are minority owned and led.

It was an incredible honor to welcome Lookup Flight Academy to Gwinnett. We signed a 25-year lease at Briscoe Field with the Black-owned pilot school, opening pilot training and careers in aviation to underrepresented communities.

Michael Ojo moved his business here because of how welcoming this community made him feel when he visited. This story is but one of thousands that we could tell as we work toward empowering minority-led small businesses.

And I would be remiss if I did not applaud the Gwinnett Chamber Foundation, whose efforts are also fostering a more inclusive and resilient business environment that empowers these entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute to our community's vibrancy.

These experiences become an important part of our history as we continue to build upon those that came before us.

Remembering where we've come from is also part of learning how to connect with each other.

As we build spaces that reflect our communities, I'm excited for our Hooper-Renwick Themed Library to open later this year. What was once the only public high school for Black students in Gwinnett will now serve as a gathering place to share our stories and shape our future.

Recently, I had the privilege of attending the Hooper-Renwick Speaker Series, hosted by the Gwinnett County Public Library Foundation and the Hooper Renwick Legacy Committee.

One of the most powerful moments came from Ms. Coni Brown, who shared her experience attending school at Hooper-Renwick. She recalled how, when schools integrated, she feared that the place where she, and so many others had built their foundation would be lost to demolition. However, she was deeply moved to learn that the school would be preserved, both as a building and as a testament to the memories, struggles, and triumphs of those who walked its halls.

To Ms. Coni, preserving Hooper Renwick meant ensuring that their history, her history, our history would not be erased or forgotten.

We're incorporating elements from the original school into the library design and preserving important memories and celebrating momentous progress — progress that reminds us we're all different yet we're all connected.

Which is why it's paramount for us to work together. We are one community that continues to innovate. We are progress oriented, and we are purpose driven.

Yet challenges remain.

And we know housing availability and affordability are more challenging than ever, but feeling at home here in Gwinnett is something we strive for every person to feel each day.

Last year, the Board of Commissioners established the housing affordability fund, which invested a historic 21 million dollars to address our housing needs. So far, we've completed more than 650 affordable housing units that are in the pipeline. And that's not all.

I'm excited to announce that just last week, we acquired, for the first time, an extended stay hotel, which will be repurposed into affordable housing units for households making less than 45,000 dollars annually, as well as seniors, homeless youth, and young adults aging out of foster care.

This historic project is an innovative and cost-effective strategy to address our housing shortages and maximize an underutilized property. It's a game changer.

And none of this would be possible without the collective efforts of the Gwinnett Housing Corporation, our Gwinnett County Planning and Development staff, and the City of Peachtree Corners, working together to ensure that our residents have access to safe, stable, and dignified housing.

This is what we can achieve when we choose to face our challenges together as one Gwinnett.

As neighborhoods and industries continue to grow in our preferred community, so does the demand for infrastructure that supports the quality of life Gwinnett is known for. To that end, the county has created a new team to coordinate infrastructure planning across multiple departments.

Leveraging people-centered design, this new team will identify smart, sustainable, and cost-effective installations of roads, trails, and water infrastructure. We've set a new standard for smart development that preserves greenspace and encompasses community input so that we can develop within the character of our existing neighborhoods.

Gwinnett stands as a model of effective governance, demonstrating what is possible as we guide our purpose and community toward continued progress. There may be many ways to get there, but there is one future for all here in Gwinnett, and that future is bright.

It starts with a forward-thinking mindset.

This Board of Commissioners and county leadership always strives to raise the bar. So, as we look at the path before us, we see that together we create the Gwinnett where everyone has the access and support to succeed.

Our stewardship of resources ensures that the growth we pursue today won't compromise the resources and prosperity that we all can enjoy tomorrow.

We are committed to fostering an economy where businesses can flourish, workers can grow their careers, and families can achieve financial security.

Our investments in infrastructure and workforce development create an environment where companies want to locate and expand.

By prioritizing smart, sustainable growth, we ensure that our economic strength benefits all residents, not just for today but for many years to come.

Safety and well-being will remain a top priority as we continue to bolster community health programs and build trust with public safety initiatives.

From engaged local organizations to our strong business community, from our more than six thousand incredible county employees to our one million vibrant residents... in 2025, we're going all in.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

Gwinnett is that boat – a beacon of possibility, a place where all can thrive, and a testament to what happens when people come together for the greater good.

We can work together, even when our opinions differ.

We can live together, even when we're from all different places and walks of life.

We can grow together, even when we're in different seasons.

We can be one, even when we're many.

Four districts, each unique yet bound together... as one community, with one purpose, and toward one future...

We are One Gwinnett.

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