

D. Paul Sommerville

October 29, 2015

Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce—State of the Region

Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. I want to thank Brigadier General Terry Williams, our men and women in uniform, my colleagues, and other state and local leaders for their participation today. I also want to take a moment to thank Bill Miles and the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event and providing us with a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other and share all the great things happening in this county we love so much. There is not enough time for me to account for all the ways the Beaufort County government team is working together on your behalf, so I am going to briefly touch on five accomplishments and initiations of Beaufort County Council related to the state of our region:

- A new community development code;
- Funding for repair and maintenance of existing roads;
- Airport and road project successes;
- Addressing a dedicated tax allocation for our critical infrastructure; and
- Advances in the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System, known as MS4.

First, this past December, Beaufort County Council approved our long-awaited **Community Development Code**. The new code formalizes a number of multi-jurisdictional common goals and objectives related to managing growth, preserving rural areas, and creating more compact, walkable, mixed-use urban areas throughout the County, while offering greater flexibility and ease of use to property owners and developers.

Earlier this year, the Beaufort County Community Development Code received the Congress for the New Urbanism's Charter Award of Merit and the Form Based-Code Institute's Driehaus Award. Both awards were presented at the 23rd annual CNU Congress in Dallas. The CNU is a non-profit group devoted to building walkable, sustainable neighborhoods. The Charter Awards are given annually to honor exemplary work in architectural, landscape, urban and regional design, and to recognize such accomplishments nationally and globally. In addition to Beaufort County, the CNU honored projects in Chicago, El Paso, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Richmond.

The Driehaus Award is presented annually by the Form-Based Code Institute, a non-profit professional organization dedicated to advancing the understanding and use of form-based codes. The Driehaus Form-Based Codes Awards recognize excellence in the writing and implementation of form-based codes that provide good examples for communities to study and learn from in their own efforts to write codes. The Beaufort County Community Development Code was the only actual code submitted to receive a Driehaus Award and is the first local government in South Carolina to win this award.

Work on the Code started in 2006, following a decade of unprecedented growth in the County. The Code, which was developed in close coordination with the City of Beaufort and Town of Port Royal, seeks to address the County's future growth in a manner which balances the preservation of natural resources, the promotion of economic development, the protection of historic properties and communities, the promotion of affordable housing, and the promotion of high development standards, while simultaneously offering more flexibility and ease of use to property owners and developers.

As South Carolina continues to grow in population, many of our communities will be faced with balancing the need to preserve natural places, promote economic opportunity, protect historic sites, and promote affordable housing while maintaining high development standards. We hope that Beaufort County's Community Development Code can serve as a model to any county, large municipality, or group of jurisdictions in the South Carolina that have an interest in preserving the best of what they have, and ensuring that they remain great places for future generations.

Regarding funding for repair and maintenance of existing roads: This year, our State legislators passed a budget supplement to pump an additional \$216 million into county transportation committee funds, which are used to repave, repair and improve state-owned secondary roads. We will see nearly \$7.5 million from this pot. Beaufort County's funding share comes from a state formula based equally on land area, population and number of miles of roads in the County. This additional money will provide an opportunity to make some substantial improvements. Over the next several weeks, Beaufort County Council will approve members for a transportation committee to determine how best to spend these funds.

I can tell the holidays are just around the corner, because the gifts keep coming to help us fund transportation-related projects. We are having great success with key **Airport and road projects**. Just a few weeks ago, Hilton Head Island Airport received over \$13 million in FAA grant funds to assist with safety projects. Additionally, the FAA has approved an environmental assessment associated with the planned runway extension at the Hilton Head Island Airport, clearing the way for Beaufort County to proceed with design and permitting of the project. The runway extension to 5,000 feet is the signature undertaking of seven projects included in the Hilton Head Island Master Plan Update that will make our airport better and improve our level of service. We are excited to continue the great momentum and look forward to moving these projects forward.

We are also excited to see some critical road projects reach milestones. The \$15 million widening of SC 170 and \$40 million Bluffton Parkway flyover projects are winding down. Once completed, they will help to relieve congestion on US 278 and provide an alternate hurricane evacuation route to I-95. We are also moving forward with increasing public safety at one of the busiest traffic corridors in the County, with a proposed frontage road project along U.S. Highway 278 at the Saint Gregory the Great Catholic Church campus.

An item that our community still needs to address is whether to have **a dedicated tax allocation for our critical infrastructure needs**. Last week, Beaufort County's Sales Tax Commission held its first meeting to begin the process for vetting projects for a potential 1-cent capital project sales tax referendum to address critical infrastructure and public safety needs in the County. This independent commission will carry out its duties while County Council deliberates whether to pursue a capital project sales tax to pay for infrastructure and public safety needs over a local-option sales tax that would give residents property-tax relief and allocate a smaller pot of money between the County and the municipalities.

Finally, Beaufort County Council approved measures to move forward with implementation of the **Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System, known as MS4**. This program is designed to help meet new federal water quality standards and control stormwater runoff thereby protecting our waterways. County government has an important role to play in protecting the health of our waterways, as water quality is fundamental to sustaining the spectacular biodiversity of our region and lowcountry setting we call home. If our water quality is not protected and managed, not only will our environment suffer, but the commercial and recreational value of our water resources will diminish. Consequently, Beaufort County Council continues to be proactive in addressing and managing stormwater runoff, as water quality preservation is fundamental to our identity, culture, and local economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, with these actions, Beaufort County Council is proudly investing in a strong foundation for the future growth of our region. Together, our future is bright.