

State of the County Address – February 5, 2008

It is an honor to present Anson County's 2008 State of the County report on behalf of the Board of Commissioners and the county staff. Anson County has many strengths and this message focuses on the current initiatives in place to maximize our assets. This report also provides our citizens (the investors of this publicly funded enterprise) with a barometer with which to measure our progress and to know about the accomplishments that have been made in the past year.

The leadership of Anson County is focused on improving the quality of life for all of its citizens, and making Anson County a place of choice when it comes to working, playing and raising a family. The following report highlights the county's progress toward meeting our 2020 Vision and Goals:

Goal - Ensure Financial Stability

Financially, the County has made great strides in the past three (3) fiscal years. The County's general fund balance has grown by \$1,500,000 since 2005 and is now in compliance with the mandated, minimum fund balance required by the Local Government Commission. Further, the Board of County Commissioners has made a commitment to maintaining and improving the facilities owned or operated by the County. This fiscal year, the County allocated over \$300,000 in new revenue from the NC Electric Membership Peaking Plant for the purpose of maintaining and/or improving facilities such as

- ◆ Hampton B. Allen Library repairs,
- ◆ new restrooms at Little Park,
- ◆ mandated health and security upgrades in the jail facility,
- ◆ improved emergency communications infrastructure,
- ◆ additional resources for the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings on the South Piedmont campus and those of the Anson County School system.

Goal – Attract & Maintain Industry

Although economic development is not a legislated responsibility of county government, attracting and maintaining industry and jobs is a priority for the current leadership of Anson County. The \$150,000,000 investment made by the NC Electric Membership Cooperative has certainly provided a much needed boost to our tax base. The County continues to seek additional investment and job creation opportunities. Over the past year the County has been involved in several local business expansions. These expansions have created over 125 new jobs for local residents. Although, progress has been made, 125 new jobs are not enough.

Your County government is committed and willing to invest resources to promote additional investment and job growth. More importantly, it is critical that our limited economic development resources are targeted to maximize effectiveness. Thus, the County funded an Economic Development Action Plan in 2007 to identify key recommendations and prioritize strategies for getting the “biggest bang for YOUR dollars”. It is imperative that we focus our resources and establish a foundation for continued success. The County will utilize its recent designation by the NC Department of Commerce as a 21st Century Community to leverage planning and grant resources to assist business leaders and community development stakeholders with developing sound strategies for long-term, sustained economic progress. It is imperative that we all know and understand that we are competing with the world for new jobs.

Goal – Promote & Assist Public Education

Workforce preparedness is another key element of economic development. The Anson County School System and South Piedmont Community College, which are funded by the County, both have accountability for this critical aspect of successful economic development. The County is responsible for the construction and maintenance of facilities for both the public school system and South Piedmont Community College.

In addition, to facility upkeep, many counties in North Carolina, including Anson, provide a current expense supplement to the local school system. Additional funding was appropriated in the current fiscal year budget to enhance local teacher supplements. Increasing teacher supplements is just one tool being utilized to retain qualified teachers. Having qualified teachers in the classrooms is one predictor of student success.

Goal – Maintain an Affordable Tax Rate

With growing inflation and ever increasing fuel prices, the County empathizes with businesses and homeowners. We understand the importance of maintaining a competitive and affordable tax rate. The County will remain committed to striking a balance between the need for additional services and programs with that of the taxpayers’ willingness and ability to pay. Further, the County will consider the feasibility of alternative revenue sources recently provided by the NC General Assembly as part of a much needed Medicaid relief plan. Counties across NC have been given the authority to seek voter approval for local revenue sources other than property taxes. These options include a sales tax which could be targeted to assist the County of Anson with improving and maintaining its facilities as well as those of the local school system and community college.

Goal – Ensure a Safe & Secure Community

Community safety is and will continue to remain a priority. Drug use and the organization of formal gangs have challenged and strained our existing law enforcement resources. The County of Anson provided additional resources this past year for a school resource officer and a drug enforcement officer. These resources will augment our current programs, but without the assistance of the community these problems will not diminish. The leadership of Anson County stands ready to partner with the local towns, community organizations, the faith community and the numerous non-profit agencies to develop holistic, community based solutions to the drug and gang problems emerging in this community. We must stand together and resist these forces to achieve success.

The County's emergency services have also been enhanced through the

- ◆ addition of staff at the 911 center,
- ◆ timely replacement of ambulance vehicles to increase reliability,
- ◆ additional fire recording channels at the Communications Center,
- ◆ additional repeater capacity to improve interagency communications,
- ◆ securing a \$200,000 federal grant for interoperability,
- ◆ and the coordinated completion of the mandated National Incident Management System (NIMS) training for all appropriate County staff.

Additionally, the County entered into a contract for a "prime-time" or high call volume ambulance services with the Anson Rescue Squad. This contract has not only provided additional emergency medical response services to the citizen of Anson County, it has also been structured to save taxpayer dollars.

Goal – Improved Community Health & Wellness

Community health and wellness is improving. Thanks to the work of the Healthy Ansonians Taskforce, the Anson County Health Department and other healthcare providers there are more opportunities than ever to access quality healthcare in this county in 2008. However, the cost of healthcare and prescription drugs can create an overwhelming financial burden for many of our residents. With this in mind, the Board of Commissioners partnered with the National Association of Counties and Caremark to offer Anson resident a no-cost prescription drug card. Since the card was introduced in April 2007, Anson residents have saved over \$5,000 on prescription drugs.

It is also important to realize health disparities still linger. This gap has been closing, but new strategies and partnerships must be forged to continue our progress. Currently the adolescent (youth age 15-17) pregnancy rate for African-American females is 3 times greater than Caucasian females and HIV/AIDS and STDs prevalence rates are 2 times greater among minorities. It is

vitaly important this community continue to explore opportunities to increase health education and awareness, examine our greatest needs and prioritize our limited healthcare resources.

Goal – Improve the Delivery of Utility Services

On a related public health note, the County is very much concerned about the availability of potable drinking water for its residents. The County continues to assess the cost and feasibility of expanding its water distribution system to allow current well user's access to high quality finished water. Expanding our current water distribution system is extremely costly and the process may seem unnecessarily slow to those in desperate need of water resources. We want you to know that the County understands your concerns, but resource decisions can not be made in a vacuum. The County's raw water intake at Blewett Falls and the State's increased focus on water quality are also placing a burden on the limited financial resources of the water system. I want to emphasize that no property tax dollars go into our water sewer systems. Operation and maintenance of both are solely funded with the revenues from customer billing. Thus, it is imperative we assess our ability to finance or assume additional debt within the limitations of our revenue structure to maintain a viable and efficient operation now and into the future. The County's water system is working to improve internal efficiency. The County's unaccounted water loss (water treated but never billed) declined for the third consecutive year in 2007. In fact, at 18% the County's unaccounted water was the lowest since data tracking began in 1997. The County's water department staff is committed to continued improvement of the system within the existing resources available.

Goal – Expand/Enhance Cultural and Recreational Opportunities

Improving the quality of life of our citizens also includes the promotion of literacy, cultural, and recreational services. These programs are often viewed as strategies to improve community health and wellness and reduce criminal activity. The County's library and park and recreation systems have never been more

effective and productive. Youth and adult participation in recreational programs is growing steadily. Due to this remarkable growth the County recently invested in restroom facilities at the park for participants and passive park users. We believe this will greatly enhance the user's experience at the park. Additional recreational improvements are planned including the renovation of the tennis courts and the expansion of the existing basketball court.

The Hampton B. Allen Library has become an all encompassing community resource. Whether its children's programs, the Brown Bag Lunch Club, after school activities, or the book club, the Library has become a hub of literacy and cultural activity. A new bookmobile, which will be in service by the late spring or early summer of 2008, will only serve to enhance the existing services provided by our proficient and extremely creative library staff.

Goal – Recruit & Retain Qualified Staff

Speaking of staff, the County is committed to providing its citizens with the most efficient and cost effective service. Thus, it is important the County have the means to recruit and retain qualified staff. The County recently began a year long emphasis on customer service and the Board has committed the financial resources to conduct a comprehensive classification and pay study. This will assist the County in identifying any potential opportunities to enhance pay or benefits to compete with the market.

County staff earned many awards and honors over the past year. These include

- ◆ advanced law enforcement certificates,
- ◆ commendations for outstanding customer service from citizens, and
- ◆ peer recognition from statewide professional organizations.

Additionally, many of our health and human service programs have received positive results from performance audits conducted by the State of North Carolina. These include, but are not limited to our Health Department's immunization program, the DSS Food Stamp unit and Child Protective Services.

Goal – Maintain a "GREEN" Anson County

We strive to be good stewards of the public's resources and trust. One of these is abundant natural resources. The Board of Commissioners is committed to keeping Anson "GREEN" and beautiful. This requires a commitment from us all to keep our roadsides free of litter and trash. The County recently matched a recycling grant to develop an oil recycling center at the regional landfill site in Polkton. It is our hope this will encourage residents to properly discard of their old oil so it does not find its way into our groundwater and ultimately drinking water. The County has also instituted an aluminum can recycling program at all County owned facilities because we believe it is important to lead by example. Reducing our residential solid waste by recycling will ultimately extend the life of our landfill, thereby preserving our valuable land.

This is YOUR government. Please seek opportunities to get involved. Accomplishing all of our goals by 2020 will require citizen input, assistance and commitment from every member of this community. We will continue to stress the importance of sound financial management, informed decision-making and evaluating the return on your investment. Thank you for entrusting us with the responsibility of fostering a magnificent quality of life for all our citizens and ensuring Anson remains an ideal place to work, play and call home.

I want to thank this board for dedicated service to Anson County. I also appreciate the work of our County Manager, Andy Lucas, and our Clerk to the Board, Bonnie Huntley, as well as county administrators and staff who continue to do more with less. Additionally, we are grateful to the many citizens who serve on county boards/committees with little or no pay and even less recognition. Thank you all very much.