The Holiday Season and 2019 are approaching quickly. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a joyous holiday season from myself, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners and the County staff.

It might be the end of the year but the Chatham County Commission and the staff are looking ahead to the future. Infrastructure is always one of the needs that is in the forefront of our planning. The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is a way for the County and its municipalities to fund those needs throughout the community. Many of the public buildings, roads resurfacing and drainage projects, and recreational facilities have been completed thanks to SPLOST funding.

Over the past two years, planning has been underway on a new Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The new facility located on Savannah Hilton Head Airport property will house the Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA), Chatham County E911 Communications Services, the Savannah Hilton Head Airport Authority Police Department, and a Traffic Management Center. Building design is underway now and the building will be completed in late 2020.

In the past 5 years, over 45 miles of roads have been paved in various Commission Districts. To determine which roads are resurfaced, Chatham County has been a pilot program community using software developed to rate roads (worse to best) and make sure that the best life cycles possible were generated on our road system. CODICE (Computerized Pavement Condition Evaluation System) is based on ratings of the pavement condition and developing a “score.” This numerical evaluation is then ranked to allow staff to get the most of our paying dollars.

In 2019, Chatham County will begin improvements to Quacco Road from IHWY 17 to I-95 overlaps. Improvements will include providing dual turn lanes from Quacco Road to US 17 and dual left turns into Quacco Road from US 17. Other improvements will be “right and left turn lanes at all major intersections; additional and multi-use paths; and pull off areas for Chatham Area TranIT will be created at each bus stop along the road. The project is being constructed in two phases. Right of way acquisitions are underway on the first phase. Residents can expect construction to begin in the summer of 2019.

The last phase of Memorial Stadium is nearing completion and we are pleased to note the value of our services in terms of dollars and cents,” said Charlotte Welch, Chair of the Live Oak Public Libraries Regional Board of Trustees. “With this community report we show library services are in great demand, cost effective, and essential in promoting reading and lifelong learning for people of all ages,” added Welch. “As we continue to grow, we are committed to meeting the needs of our communities.”

“For every dollar our county invests in our libraries, the community realizes more than four dollars in service value,” said Tom Skon, Executive Director of Live Oak Public Libraries. “Using the best of business practices, including economy of scale and resource sharing, our libraries efficiently manage resources to build and support a more sustainable community,” noted Skon.

Live Oak Public Libraries is a system of 16 libraries and one bookmobile providing programs and services in Chatham, Effingham, and Liberty Counties. Our mission is to provide excellent, responsive service to enrich people’s lives, support lifelong learning and build and enhance our communities.

Transportation helps connect people to the places where they live, work, and play. Moreover, efficient, reliable transportation is essential to improving quality of life and economic vitality. Every five years, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are required to update the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) which serves as the blueprint for the region’s multimodal transportation system. The MTP will guide regionally significant transportation investments designed to develop a well-balanced transportation system that promotes a good quality of life and supports a prosperous economy for the region.

Over the past year and a half, the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO) has been working on the development of the next MTP, Mobility 2045, which will be adopted in August 2019.

One of the initial steps was to develop the goals and vision for the plan. Residents were asked what the most important aspects of transportation were to them and where they saw the biggest issues. CORE staff collected over 700 survey responses and comments. Some of the areas of concern included safety concerns, a need for improved opportunities for biking and walking, improved transit service and overall transportation options and connectivity. Based on the feedback the CORE staff drafted a set of goals representing a broad statement of our region’s desired future conditions. These goals and performance objectives are targeted to ensure that the transportation system helps the region attain its overall vision for the future. These goals provide a framework for the provision of a safe, secure, efficient, multimodal transportation network that meets the mobility needs of both people and freight.

CORE MPO staff is currently working with the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) assessing the current transportation system deficiencies and future needs based upon projected population and employment growth. Once the deficiencies are identified a list of projects will be compiled based on the Mobility 2045 goals and financial constraints.

In spring 2019 CORE MPO staff will host a series of public open houses to encourage public review and comment on the draft plan and project list. Following a review and comment period, any necessary revisions to the plan will be made prior to the CORE MPO meeting in August.
In September of 1878, thanks to SPLF funding, the newly constructed Memorial Stadium was opened. The modern structure included a special turf field designed to be cooler for the players, a real plus in the heat of South Georgia. The primary use of the past has been for high school football. In fact, every local high school has played games there. That will continue to be the primary activity at the stadium, but the field can accommodate soccer, lacrosse, youth football, and concerts as well.

The original stadium built in 1957 was dedicated to the memory of all Georgians who have served in the armed forces. The original stadium was designed to give the American's with Disabilities Act, and had to have several modifications over the years to make it accessible. Ramps were added, bathrooms were retrofitted, and the locker rooms were adapted. This new stadium was designed from the beginning to meet ADA standards.

There are two sets of nice, big, modern bathrooms. The design also boosts new concession stands and there is braille signage throughout the complex. Both the home and visitor’s locker rooms are designed to be accessible to those with disabilities.

Ramps at all four corners of the stadium lead to multiple sections designed for both wheelchair and companion seating. There is also ample ADA parking spaces on each side of the stadium.

It is a great improvement over the old stadium which was showing the effects of sixty years of use.

February is Severe Weather Preparation Month and is a chance for residents to learn about and prepare for severe weather. Severe weather such as severe thunderstorms, hail, wind, and tornadoes can be seen throughout the year in Georgia, but tornadoes specifically tend to peak from late March to early April. While April showers bring May flowers, the temperature increase can also create an unstable atmosphere, environment conducive to tornadoes and severe thunderstorms. If radar indicates unstable or the National Weather Service receives reports of severe weather, they issue a Severe Thunderstorm Watch, or a Tornado Watch, or an Am.

The next step you can take is updating your emergency plan to include where you will go, what supplies you will have, and how you will communicate when disaster strikes. During a severe weather warning, you may be advised to seek immediate shelter in an interior room on the lowest level of your home/building. While this may be inconvenient, it is for your safety. Strong winds, damaging hail, and tornadoes are very unpredictable and can occur in the space in your home and is how you will get there quickly during a severe weather event. The next step is ensuring your emergency kit is up-to-date. You will want to include water, nonperishable food, a NOAA Weather Radio, and a flashlight. For a complete list of items you can pack, visit the CEMA website. Last but not least, you should keep a written list of important phone numbers and contact as in your emergency kit.

Following a severe storm, your community may have experienced damage. Prepare ahead of time for how you and your community will take action following damaging severe weather. Consider creating a check-in plan with neighbors and friends, discuss what resources your neighborhood has and what role individuals are willing to take during a cleanup effort. Another way to prepare for damage is by talking with your insurance provider annually to make sure your policy is up-to-date and you have adequate coverage for your property. Early spring is the perfect time to discuss purchasing or renewing a Flood Insurance Policy in preparation for severe storms and the hurricane season. Chatham County Flood Zones are based on freshwater only, if you live in Chatham County and have water damage from a flooding or storm surge, your damages may be denied coverage without a Flood Policy. To learn more about flood insurance and connect with a local agent, visit www.

report onSevere Weather Happens Here—Are You Ready?

Severe Weather Warning to notify those in the affected areas of the anticipated event and its associated risks. Being informed can save lives. This is why you should start your preparations efforts by signing up to receive CEMA Alerts through the CEMA website: www.chathamereg.org, purchase a NOAA Weather Radio and/or by following CEMA on social media @ChathamEMA.

On average, Chatham County Animal Services takes care of approximately 12 animals a day. This includes animals that are surrendered to us by owners, those that are found and brought in by residents of Chatham County, and those picked up by our officers. When we find or receive an animal, we run a hand-held scanner over them searching for a microchip. This is a small transponder, about the size of a grain of rice, encased in glass, that may have been implanted under the animal’s skin. The microchip is not a GPS locator, as some might believe. It does not always constantly send a signal. This only happens when it is activated by the radio waves emitted by the scanner. The scanner then reads the signal and displays the ID number associated with each unique signal. After obtaining the ID number, we can try to make contact with the microchip company to get the owner’s contact information. We then contact the owner to come pick up their lost pet.

The microchip provides an excellent way to reunite lost pets with their owners but there are some important things to remember. First, all pets should be microchipped. The implantation is done by injection similar to a vaccine with a needle and is virtually painless. Often, owners choose not to microchip their small dogs or cats for a multitude of reasons. They use the same logic for choosing not to vaccinate their animals for rabies, saving them a few dollars, even though these animals “never go outside, don’t bite, or run out of my sight.” These are a lot of the cases that we see because these animals are the ones that bolt and disappear when they accidentally get outside alone.

The implantation of the microchip collects the owner’s information at time of implantation and automatically registers the microchip. However, sometimes it is left up to the owner to register the information. Therefore, it is very important to ask if you need to register your pet’s microchip when they are receiving the microchip. Another extremely important point is that should your contact information change, you need to remember to update information with the microchip company. An old phone number or address will not help your pet make it safely back home. Most microchip registries allow you to change information at no charge.

The amount of time it takes to find your pet when lost can be significantly shortened if they are microchipped. Often, when an owner finds an animal at large, they can scan them in the field and return them before taking to the shelter. Another benefit of microchipping is it allows for positive identification in case of ownership disputes.

Microchipping is typically done by your veterinarian. At Chatham County Animal Services, we also offer microchipping for $20 which includes basic registration. Call us for more information at 912-652-6757.

The Importance of Microchipping Your Pet

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As their 2019 Legislative Preview on Saturday, January 12, 2019, Georgia Equality honored Chatham County Sheriff John T. Wilcher with the 2019 Champions for Equality Award.

“It is a true honor to have received this award and I am humbled by this organization’s effort to recognize me,” said Wilcher.

The Annual Champion for Equality Award is given to an individual for their efforts in advancing fairness, safety and opportunities for the LGBTQ people in Chatham County.

Wilcher has been a long-time champion for equality and his compassion and relentless tenacity for positive change has had an extensive impact on not only the individuals of the Chatham County Sheriff’s Office, but on the law enforcement community at large.

“Building a progressive infrastructure that advocates for all of the above is something I am very passionate about and I hope that this award will open up some doors to allow me to continue to do that,” he said.

Georgia Equality Names Chatham County Sheriff John T. Wilcher the 2019 Champion for Equality
Chatham County Police Department CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Needed equipment was purchased, which included everything from police vehicles to office supplies. Policies and procedures were carefully crafted and implemented. In addition, officers spent hundreds of hours of their beat time proactively reaching out to citizens in an effort to partner with the community to keep unincorporated Chatham County safe.

"Community policing is our guiding philosophy, and both our officers and citizens have embraced it," said Chatham County Police Chief Jeff Hadley. "Community policing is not a spectator sport. It requires the dedication and participa-
tion of people on both sides of the badge in order to be successful."

As part of the community policing philosophy, officers are expected to drop by businesses and get out of their cars to walk through neighborhoods in between answering calls. This gives citizens a chance to know the officers who patrol their area, and to speak to them about any concerns they may have. Officers also use the time as an opportunity to educate citizens about ongoing issues and crime prevention.

Hadley says the support of other law enforcement agencies, including the Chatham County Sheriff's Office and Savannah Police Department, has been invaluable. He gives much of the credit for the success of the depart-
ment in its first year to the sworn men and women who wear the badge, the civilians, and every member of Team Chatham who helped the department build and grow.

"The amount of work and effort involved in putting together this department from the ground up is truly amazing," said Hadley. "We benefited from the help and expertise of staff from our other public agencies, and their assistance was incredibly important to us. This is a perfect example of Team Chatham pulling together with a focus and a vision, and the end result is one that will benefit every member of our community for years to come."

Janice Bocook, Clerk of the Chatham County Commission, recently earned the Certified Municipal Clerk (C.M.C.) designation from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. The certification process is offered in Georgia by the Carl Vinson School of Government at the University of Georgia.

The C.M.C. designation is the second highest certification in the world for municipal clerks. Earning the designation is a demanding undertak-
ing that requires an educational component, and social and professional contributions. Educational requirements include classes in topics such as policy, human resources, ethics, open meetings, and effective communication.

Janice, Team Chatham congratulates you on your new hard earned designation!!!

CHATHAM COUNTY LEADERS GRADUATE FROM THE GEORGIA ACADEMY FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Commissioner James "Jay" Jones recently graduated from the Board of Georgia Academy for Economic Develop-
ment’s 2018 Region 12 Multi-Day Training Program. Class participants represented a number of professional and non-professional economic development fields, including elected officials, public servants, business leaders, educators, and social service providers from 10 counties in Coastal Georgia. The Academy provided each of the graduates an opportunity to gain a unique understanding of the complexities of economic and community development on the local, regional, and state levels.

“One of the goals for the multi-day regional Academies is to encourage multi-county cooperation," says Corrine Thornton, Director of the Georgia Academy for Economic Development. "Many times the participants discover the issues facing their community are the same as those facing other communities in their region, and can then combine limited resources to address the issue."

The Academy’s multi-day program, taught one day a month over a four-month period, includes training in the basics of economic and community development, plus specialized segments on business recruitment and retention, tourism product development, downtown develop-
ment, planning, and other essentials for community success. In addition, the curriculum features specific leadership skills such as consensus building, ethics in public service, collaborative leadership and other segments needed for effective community leadership in economic develop-
ment. Local elected officials may receive certification training credits through the Association County Commissioners of Georgia and the Georgia Municipal Association for completion of this program.

Let’s Go! Is Well On Its Way!

Chatham Area Transit (CAT) recently launched its Let’s Go! Designing Better Transit Together initiative, which will result in a system-wide redesign of the community’s bus network. The 18 month comprehensive redesign effort is a first for CAT, which has many buses routes that have not been changed in decades despite our ever-growing population.

This innovative process will help us step back from the current transit system, rethink the bus routes within our community, and design a system that reflects the values, needs, and available resources of our community.” Chief Executive Officer Curtis Koehler said. Throughout this project, the community’s input is needed to help make the tough choices of redesigning a transit network. Phase I: Transit Choices, focused on the big picture value choices, such as what is more important - high ridership or widespread coverage?

Phase II: Network Concepts will produce two vastly different concept maps. Feedback on these options will then influence the new bus network (routes, frequency, hours of service, etc.). Phase III: The Draft Network Plan, will provide a final opportunity for input and be thoroughly discussed by CAT’s Board of Directors before a final vote on implementation.

During each phase of Let’s Go! CAT will host community meetings and surveys to continue seeking feedback. Visit letsgo.cutchacat.org for more information and to sign up for email updates, participate in surveys, learn about upcoming meetings, and review reports and maps. To share feedback or request a Transit Talk in your neighborhood, send an email to letsgo@cutchacat.org. Hope to see you at one of our community events this spring!
Starfish Swim School’s learn to swim program and can recite the swim and safety skills for every level, but that is where her swimming experience stopped. Like many adults who do not swim, she had a harrowing experience as a child. She was thrown into the deep end a pool, went to the bottom and a family member had to rescue her. From that day, she avoided any situation that put her near any type of water. For 30 years, Priscilla took a family vacation to Hawaii in 2017. While her family played and splashed in the pool, Priscilla sat alone on the pool side. She wanted to join them but her fear held her back. That was her “AHA moment.” When she returned home, she decided to take the plunge and learn to swim. Priscilla and her instructor started slowly in the shallow end getting comfortable before going under the water. Initially, breath control was difficult for her. She swallowed many mouthfuls of pool water before learning how to hold her breath under the water. When Priscilla mastered floating on her back, she began working on forward movement with direction change (kicking and paddling). Once she figured out how and when to breathe while swimming, there was no stopping her. Priscilla has made great progress the last 6 months on her learn-to-swim journey. She is now a competent swimmer in both shallow and deep water. She swims on her own 3 days each week before starting her work day. Priscilla says, “I am now comfortable in the pool and I am confident that if I ever got into trouble, I could save myself. The fact that the fear no longer dominates me allows me to freely enjoy being with my family around any aquatic setting.”

Adult Swim Lessons are offered year round at the Aquatic Center. Please visit our website aquatic.chathamcounty.org for more details. It is never too late to learn how to swim.