

## 2022 State of the County Address – Surry Together, Moving Forward

Greetings from the Surry County Administrator's Office and the entire Surry County Team. I am Melissa Rollins, County Administrator and it gives me great pleasure to recap 2022 with this year's virtual state of the County address.

This address is being delivered on this platform so that more of you can see what has transpired in the community in 2022 and get a glimpse as to the direction of some initiatives in the future.

In 2021, our message "Surry County on the Rise" was an overview of a remarkable year while still facing Pandemic related challenges, but together we delivered and made some giant steps forward in enhancing governmental services and improving the quality of life for the citizens.

Reflecting on the year, it has been a year of continued progression despite normal and unanticipated challenges. The message this year **Surry Together, Moving Forward** is one of unity and visioning for the future:

We have made some giant steps forward. Surry County is far ahead of many localities in providing universal broadband coverage to the entire county. Other communities are adopting the model we have in place. Today, we have over 1650 Residential Users and 46 businesses connected to Ruralband. Surry County, this presents business growth, educational, social connectivity, and healthy outcome opportunities.

Learning from the pandemic, we used collaboration, innovation, and creativity to consistently deliver services. We implemented live stream of meetings to keep citizens engaged and informed and removed customer service barriers for needed services.

Let's take a further look at 2022 in Review:

#1 - We have moved forward with long awaited projects such as the Mobile Radio Communication System. Surry County Public Safety Radio Project began this past summer and will continue for the next 12+ months. This standalone P25 Compliant Radio system will not only increase our current coverage from 60% to a guaranteed 95% coverage while giving us the ability to be interoperable with surrounding jurisdictions.

#2 - Our team has taken a bold step in embarking on a major overhaul of our financial software system to bring timely, and data driven financial reporting to stakeholders. The 22-year-old legacy system in place was first installed in 1999. The new Enterprise Resource Management (ERP) system will include the County, Schools and Social Services and is inclusive of all financials, human resources, permitting, payroll and taxes. We will advance to technology that will foster ease of operations, greater transparency, and the ability to work smarter.

#3 - The County's Shared Building Inspections Program with the County of Sussex has far exceeded our expectations in customer service and operational efficiency. We continue to be a model community, once again winning a prestigious award for innovation and creativity in local government. Certainly, a unique and collaborative program where shared resources from two neighboring communities has had proven solution-oriented results. We are proud of the success of this program.

#4 - Community events truly represent the best of Surry where citizens of all ages and backgrounds come out to enjoy and experience a sense of community. Sheriff Turner has been instrumental in our community

engagement efforts by sponsoring community engagement events that are exemplary of Unity in the Community:

National Night Out and Halloween Trunk O Treat are popular events that brings hundreds of citizens together with community organizations.

#5 Parks and Recreation is busier more than as the building and grounds facility is utilized by thousands of patrons at events such as family reunions, youth sports activities, the 4th of July Fireworks event, and Nottoway Pow Pow, fitness classes, and more.

# -6 Of course, Surry High School Homecoming Parade is always a huge hit for the community. As too our Friday Farmer's Market and specialty Holiday markets.

#7- We were excited to finally make much needed improvements to our Animal Shelter and Solid Waste Convenience Sites.

#8- We continue to look at public safety holistically, understanding the crucial need to revamp our EMS rescue services to provide the best response and service to citizens. (TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN VOLUNTEER IN EMERGENCY SERVICES PROGRAMS, CONTACT THE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AT 757-294-5292

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

We are excited to have on the Surry Team Economic Development Consultant Renee Chapline to work alongside the Board of Supervisors and Administration team to help advance our economic development initiatives.

Surry County's economy has made great strides toward recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. As of October 2022, the county's measured unemployment rate was 2.6 percent, well below its pre-pandemic level. Surry County's Office of Economic Development has seen an uptick in activity in 2022. Many citizens and visitors alike are enjoying the serene outdoors activities in the county and sharing their positive experience with their friends and neighbors. The walking Trail on Marina Drive has been completed with a picnic area and shelter to enjoy the scenic views overlooking the marina and waterfront. On any given day you can see the boaters launching their boats during the day and experience the best sunset views in Virginia.

The County's offers a unique combination of small-town charm, pristine waterfront properties, outdoor activities including a superb state park, historic and scenic views, and all just a short ferry ride from historic Williamsburg known as the smallest city with the biggest international address. It is these unique attributes that continue to bring visitors to the County to experience our people, charm, and culture.

Surry County has more than 300 small businesses sharing their skills, talents, and passions with the county and across the globe. Access to high-speed internet has made it possible for our small businesses to thrive and grow in Surry County and achieve regional, state, and global reach furthering the reputation of the County. The fiber to the home project made access available to every household. The project was made possible through a

combination of federal and state grants. The County's elected leaders and administration made an unwavering commitment to Surry's businesses and residents alike, to prioritize availability of high-speed internet in Surry County to strengthen education for students, increase commerce and encourage growth and development opportunities in the county.

The Grays Creek Marina and Surry Seafood Company have had a fantastic year with increased traffic and will continue to be a major outdoor attraction for many years to come. The bold decision by Surry County's elected officials and administration to purchase the abandoned restaurant has proven to be a successful venture for Surry County. The restaurant was leased by Restaurateurs Randy and Brian Pack that grew the business into a destination restaurant drawing from Richmond, Williamsburg, and Hampton Roads. The investment by the county has supported the visionary approach by the county leaders and now is a showcase property hosting 45 gorgeous floating docks and a marine store.

Soon the county will welcome a new Mexican Restaurant, Morelia's with a projected opening date of second quarter 2023. Our small businesses are the county's best ambassadors as they sell their services and products around the world representing the best of Surry County Virginia.

A long-awaited grocery store is projected to open in 2023, the County and its partners having made great strides in 2022 to advance the project following challenges posed by the pandemic and supply-chain delays. Renovation of the property is currently underway. This project is an example of the successes that can be achieved by working together. The project is partially funded by the state and local resources with the county having secured funding from a state grant to combat "food deserts" in Virginia. In addition, the Obici Healthcare and the Genan Foundations have also supported the project through grants and continues to be significant partners to the County in this endeavor as it supports their vision of "good health and wellness for all."

The newest development that many of you enjoyed in the past couple of weeks is the new Family Dollar/Dollar Tree combo store opening just in time for the holiday season. The 24000 + square foot store is a significant investment in the county and offers frozen and refrigerated foods, beauty and health products, apparel, toys and home goods. Equally exciting, this new business brought over 20 jobs to the County, with most of the employees at this location being Surry County residents.

The leadership team are focusing on strategies to improve Surry County's economic competitiveness for business in the county. However, a key to continued growth and expansion of businesses in the County is housing for the employees of such businesses. The office of economic development is currently working with housing development projects that will improve the available housing stock.

2022 was also a year of collaboration between our neighboring communities. Working closely with our local Towns and surrounding localities to execute formal MOU's memorializing our partnerships aimed to increase efficiency in services, working together to find common ground for the betterment of the entire community by moving forward together.

The County is fortunate to have so many opportunities and strong partnerships. Opportunities which will enable the County to leverage the strengths, ingenuity and talent of the County's citizens. All of these economic development investments will grow the tax base to support education and amenities for our citizens to thrive and enjoy for many years to come.

This year, Surry's County Administrator, Mrs. Rollins, coined the positioning statement "Surry together moving forward". This seems quite apropos, as we enter a new beginning in **2023**. The Economic Development team, Administration and elected officials will continue to work together building on our strengths to create the best Surry we can be "**Together**"

Thank you, Ms. Chapline,

As you can see, it's all about the "we." We strengthen this community together. We make this County shine together. We can continue to thrive together.

As we continuously hear about workforce challenges, Surry County is fortunate to have an incredible leadership team that works diligently to keep the County flourishing and to deliver the best of the best of services. We welcomed new faces over the last few months. Thank you, Mr. David Harrison, Deputy County Administrator the leadership team and the great support staff for exemplifying excellence.

Beyond our wonderful support staff, there have been volunteers from the community, other community organizations, and citizens giving their time to boards and commissions. So let us take a moment right now to express our gratitude for all that you do every day to make our community a better place.

**Planning Commission/Board of Zoning Appeals**  
**Youth services Citizen Board**  
**Economic Development Authority**  
**Parks and Recreation Commission**  
**Highway Safety Transportation commission**  
**Surry County School Board**  
**Surry County Social Services Board**

We appreciate the opportunity to work in sync with the Dr. Sims, Superintendent and Ms. Valerie Pierce, Director of Surry Social Services, and all constitutional and staff officers throughout the year to meet our collective goals.

As we continue to seek growth and prosperity while balancing the unique characteristics as a rural county, it takes working together, collaborating, visioning, and exercising creativity, to make Surry economically stronger, healthier, and more attractive for growth opportunities.

**Message from Judy Lyttle, Chair of the Surry County Board of Supervisors  
and Vice Chair- Robert Elliot, Jr.**

THIS CONCLUDES OUR 2022 VIRTUAL STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS, WISHING YOU A SAFE, HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.