

Good evening,

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the members of the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors. The accomplishments I will speak of tonight are due to their actions.

Howard Simpson, Chairman of the Board, representing District 101

Bobby Jones, Vice-Chair, representing District 201

Jerry Townsend, representing Districts 301 & 302

Dr. Odessa Pride, representing District 401

Bob Timmons, representing Districts 501 & 502

Rev. Calvin Gray, representing District 601

Jim Wilck, representing District 701

Pattie Cooper-Jones, representing District 801

Decisions and actions these ladies and gentlemen have taken have directly caused the successes I am about to enumerate. But they would be the first to tell you they are not the only reason Prince Edward County is strong and becoming stronger. They realize our greatest accomplishments are realized when we all work together. I will touch more on that later.

I will start by speaking about some of our latest accomplishments and basic financial reviews. The remainder of the time will be focused on the future. Past accomplishments are noteworthy and help secure the future by delivering dividends in the future but these accomplishments are historical and rooted in the past. It is the future that is the most important and provides us the opportunity to improve the lives of the citizens of Prince Edward County.

Over the last year there have been improvements in our infrastructure. In partnership with the School Board, the Board of Supervisors approved a \$5.1M school renovation project. The project replaced leaking roofs, improved security for our children, reduced energy and operating costs and improved the learning environment for our students and the working environment for faculty and staff. The annual guaranteed energy savings achieved through these renovations will pay for much of the cost of the project, while reduced debt payments will fund the remainder. The end result is a project that will result in a better learning environment and prolong the life of existing facilities while not increasing the annual debt service.

Another infrastructure improvement, while not costly, will significantly increase the safety of our citizens and our law enforcement personnel. As of today, the Prince Edward County Sheriff's Office is benefitting from a significantly enhanced public safety communications system. This was accomplished through a collaborative effort between the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff's Office, and the Virginia State Police. This enhancement eliminates most of our communication dead zones that impacted the Sheriff's office. The Board's efforts on public safety communications continue with a pending grant application for a western tower that could also be of benefit to our volunteer fire and EMS agencies.

Due to the actions of the Sheriff's office, the Commonwealth Attorney, and increased community policing the citizens of Prince Edward are safer. The number of offenses reported in 2016 is approximately 40% less than in 2015.

Prior Boards worked hard to place Prince Edward on firm financial footing. At the end of FY15 the County had over \$10M in reserve. The sudden shock of the regional jail adding a new expense of over \$1.1M to our annual budget created a temporary hurdle. At the same time the sale of a local trash collection company to an out of County firm caused a loss of \$230,000 in landfill revenue. In a budget our size this is a large jolt. To try to plug that hole by only increasing revenues would have required an increase in the real estate tax rate of at least nine cents.

When several people are responsible for making a decision there are bound to be different ideas on how the final decision should be shaped. The Board had to make hard choices, to solve this budget challenge. The Board did not panic, but instead gathered themselves by creating a finance committee and working the last two years to adjust operating expenses while maintaining service levels and maintaining funding to the public schools. The Board worked together, members made compromises on many issues and solved the challenge. During last year's budget process the board solved about a third of the challenge. Entering the current fiscal year (FY17) the budget shortfall had been reduced to about \$1M. In FY16 the Board used approximately \$1M from the reserve to balance the budget. During the FY17 budget process the Board once again made hard choices and balanced the budget without the use of any reserves.

The Board also approved other capital expenditures that will serve the County's citizens for years to come. They approved the construction of a new cell at the landfill which should serve our citizens for the next 7 or 8 years. The cost of this project was slightly more than \$1.4M and was paid from reserves contained in the Landfill Construction Fund. The Board has had the vision to anticipate expenses associated with the landfill and has built cash reserves to allow the costs to be paid without the use of debt. The Board also approved contracts concerning the Courthouse roof. The contracts called for the replacement of the sloped roofs with metal and the repair and sealing of the existing flat roofs which will extend their life by at least 20 years. The cost of this project was almost \$262,000.

The use of the reserve to balance the FY16 budget and the capital projects mentioned above caused the expenditure of approximately \$2.7M of the County's reserve. The audit will be completed later this fall and we will know the exact amount of the FY16 ending fund balance but I estimate it will be in the neighborhood of \$7.5 M. This is enough to provide the cash we need until the real estate and personal property tax bills are delivered and provide a reserve for any emergencies. Financially, the County is strong with one of the lowest tax rates in the Commonwealth. The ranking of Farmville as the second most tax-friendly community in Virginia for retirees by SmartAsset.com validates that statement.

The future of the County is bright. It is bright because your Board is made up of responsible leaders, leaders focused on putting people over politics. Leaders who are making difficult choices, embracing and in fact initiating change as they look to the future.

The local economy is strong and becoming stronger. In the first eight months of 2015 we had only 1 building permit issued for a commercial activity. For the same period in 2016 that number is 11. Increased commercial activity means more jobs for our citizens. Over the last three years hundreds of new jobs have been created. The list of companies who have opened or expanded is long – Immigration Centers of America, Paris Ceramics, Tri-Boro Rack, Tri-Boro Shelving, Lapp Metals, Nature Chem, Power Secure, Centra, J.R. Tharpe Trucking, Helton House, Luck Stone, W.C. Newman, Adams Construction and several small shops downtown - all either added jobs to existing businesses or announced the opening of a new business creating new jobs. These announcements have helped diversify our economy and

have provided jobs that pay a wide spectrum of wages. This growth has not stopped; we are seeing an increase in prospect visits and hope to announce the arrival of new businesses in the near future.

The recent announcements of three new hotels mean even greater growth. Once completed these hotels will add about 270 new rooms to the local economy. Assuming an occupancy rate of 75 % and an average local expenditure of only \$200 per nightly room stay, which includes the cost of the room, almost \$15M of new money will churn through the local economy. We are confident this increase in revenue will generate new investment in other retail establishments generating even more jobs and revenue for our local economy.

The last few years have been one of tremendous transition for our community. Fully one-half of the Board of Supervisors are in their first term of office, there is a new Director of Planning and Community Development and the office of economic development will have new personnel and a renewed focus. The County has just recently joined the regional economic development organization – the Virginia Growth Alliance (VGA). The VGA is a regional alliance consisting of 10 counties and the City of Emporia. It is working closely with Longwood's Small Business Development Center, the region's community colleges and the workforce development boards that represent the members. It is a collaborative partnership which meshes well with the recently approved strategic vision the Board is developing of which I will speak more of later.

This transitional wave has also flowed over other organization in our County. The Prince Edward County Public Schools have a new Chairman and Vice-Chair of the School Board and a new superintendent. Hampden-Sydney College has a new president and Farmville has a new Mayor. The Farmville Downtown Partnership has a new manager and the Chamber of Commerce has a new executive director and the citizens elected a new Commonwealth's Attorney. Finally, Longwood University recently appointed a new president.

The new leadership has created a burst of energy. The organizations listed above are taking a renewed look at how they achieve their missions and the impact each has on Prince Edward. Collaboration is thick in the air. There is the realization that all of us are linked together, that we are stronger working as a team. Just one example of this collaboration is the creation of a new website designed to increase tourism. I encourage all of you to go to the new site – [VisitFarmville.com](http://VisitFarmville.com). This website was created as the result of a collaborative effort between the Town of Farmville, Longwood and Prince Edward County. I want to thank Longwood and President Reveley for providing the financing needed to create this site.

As described above the Board of Supervisors have tackled and solved many of our most pressing challenges. They have now turned their attention to the future. They have started the process to make Prince Edward County the destination that both people and businesses can call home. They are working to ensure growth and prosperity, what we can do together to become a more vibrant community. They understand we must compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. We must create the conditions that allow diverse jobs for our youth, with a skilled labor force capable of meeting the needs of business.

The Board has started the process of developing a strategic path forward. They have adopted a new vision statement and mission statement and strategic direction and priorities. The Board identified 7 critical target areas or strategic priorities which will become the major focus areas to achieve the Board's vision. The seven strategic priorities are (1) Economic Development, (2) Mobility, (3) Fiscal Responsibility, (4) Cultural Center, (5) Education, (6) Public Safety, and (7) Collaboration. After identifying the 7 critical target areas the Board identified 3-year priorities considered most critical to

advancing the vision for each critical target area. The Board has directed staff to create a 3-year strategic work plan to address the Vision and priorities established. You will be hearing more about that plan in the near future.

One theme that permeates all of the 7 critical areas is collaboration. The priorities in all 7 critical areas contain the word "*collaboration*" or a phrase with the same meaning. The Board realizes it is time to work together to move Prince Edward County forward.

The Board is looking to the future. They are setting the groundwork which will make the work of future Boards easier. They are tackling the tough questions now, working to ensure future generations have a more economically secure and prosperous community.