



## **2022 State of the City Address**

***Mayor Jonathan Elmore***

***April 21, 2022***

Welcome everyone. For my introduction today, I would like to deliver a little three-part sermon on faith.

My wife and kids have lately been fond of saying “in the olden days.” Well, in the olden days when I was in architecture school, we took architecture history our freshman year. And we began to wonder about these great buildings—how in the world did they design them? And so, painfully, over the next four years, we learned that design is a process of decisions. Thousands of decisions. And I’m sure it’s similar to what many of you have learned in your lives and careers. As we cycled through that process, we gained confidence and became better designers. So, we learned to have faith in a process even though we didn’t yet know the solution. We developed faith we would find the answer. That’s part one.

Part two is about a man named George Willis who made a fortune selling health tonics or “snake oil.” And with his wealth, he took his wife on a trip to England, and there was smitten by the city of Stratford-Upon-Avon, a city outside of London and the birthplace of Shakespeare. He wanted to emulate Stratford. So, he returned to America and bought a dairy farm outside the hustle and bustle of Atlanta. And with faith, he hired designers and engineers and laid out and built our fair city. They created tree-lined streets with an eclectic mix of residential architecture and sidewalks, pocket parks, a roundabout, a lake, and a park. And he began a commercial district in the Tudor style, our Tudor Village. And then, the Great Depression struck, and everything ground to a halt. And over the years our residential side continued to evolve with more beautiful houses and great people, but our commercial side progressed in fits and starts.

Part three. A few years back, a group of designers, gardeners, and all-around Willis fans formed a group called Second Century Avondale to “finish the thought” that George Willis had begun. They began to advocate for designing and completing the commercial district including a town green, amongst other ideas. And they began a groundswell of interest in better design. And our previous Board wisely bought this land out of bankruptcy. Somewhere in there, the Board, including myself and Commissioners Brian Fisher and Adele Yelton began to push the idea of a town green. And with the leadership of our Downtown Development Authority, we staged a design competition from which emerged a clear winner, Concept Nine by Sheri Locke, which featured two buildings fronting North Avondale Road/278 with a park to the north. We then hired consultants to help us figure out the mix of commercial uses and how to pay for it and

eventually passed resolutions to take out a bond and proceed with a developer on design and construction.

We had faith in the process.

And so, today I stand before you proudly, but humbly, to deliver the 2022 State of the City in our NEW TOWN GREEN!

At this time, I'd like to recognize and thank our partners Fabric Developers, Stevens and Wilkinson and Site Solutions, our designers, and Reeves Young, the contractors. By the end of the summer, the Town Green Market Pavilion will be complete at the corner of N. Avondale and Oak St. This open-air market pavilion will be a space for farmers' markets and events. It will expand the Town Green by 4,200 square feet and will support between 140-500 people depending on the setup. The roofline of the structure will reflect the rhythm and patterns of the Tudor-style buildings that define the historic character of Avondale Estates. Our new town green is just one example of how we've transformed the City's governance into a body that is action driven. Not only are we strategic with our planning, we are backing it up with results. And we're just getting started.

### **New Development**

Because of the investment we've made in this Town Green, we've created a very attractive area that investors want to be a part of. We're in discussions now with multiple development partners about dynamic, transformative new projects that we'll share with you soon. And we continue our work with Fabric Developers to flush out the details of the Town Green commercial development that will bring 20,000 square feet of retail including chef-driven restaurants and businesses that will activate the edge of the park with outdoor dining and inviting spaces.

Additionally, we've seen great examples of adaptive reuse with the creation of Little Cottage Brewery at 120 Pine and Santo Cantina + Cocina at 31 N. Avondale. And we're looking forward to the opening of Olive & Pine, a mercantile hall with an open-air pavilion.

On the housing front, we're starting the next phase of development that builds on what the Willis and Bellevue apartments started. New town homes being constructed by the Toll Brothers at the intersection of Hobbs and Wells will continue to add to the diversity of housing types in the City.

### **Finances**

Speaking of investments, I'm proud to say that the City is in a very healthy position financially. Housing values are tracking 15-20% higher this year. Commercial property values continue to rise as new developments and businesses are brought online. We have the largest reserves in the history of the City. For the first time in the City's history, we've developed a long-term, multi-year capital program plan to address streets, sidewalks and storm water improvements throughout the City that have been needed for decades. Utilizing multiple funding sources will

allow us to speed up the implementation of these projects. As development increases downtown, we anticipate revenues to increase more rapidly than they have in the past. These extra funds will allow the City to continue with the vision that you helped us outline—to provide quality services and civic spaces such as this one where we can connect as a community.

### **North Avondale Complete Street**

Nothing illustrates more clearly about having faith in the process than our most transformative project, the North Avondale Complete Street project. I like to think of this project like one of our Avondale Lake ducks swimming across the water. It might appear that there is little action taking place as it glides across the lake, but under water there is furious paddling propelling tremendous motion. We continue to paddle away securing the rights-of-way needed to build the project. Following this phase, we will complete construction drawings, go out for bids and begin construction in early 2023. Construction will move block by block for approximately 18 months, ultimately creating a safe main street we can be proud of with wider sidewalks and beautiful landscaping that will better connect our neighborhood to the Central Business District and encourage our residents and visitors to walk, bike, shop, dine and explore.

### **Storm water**

Another major topic we continue to tackle is the city's storm water infrastructure. We completed the Storm water Capital Project Priority Plan to meet regulatory requirements, address flooding, and repair and maintain our aging storm sewer system. There is no quick fix to these ongoing problems, but we now have a proactive, comprehensive storm water management program that will help us get a grip on these issues.

And I'm excited to announce that work began this week on phase one of the North Woods projects which will create a walking trail through the woods connecting the sidewalk at Berkeley Road to the Lake Trail that circles Lake Avondale. The next phases of the project will include repair of the eroded stream bank and installation of three rain gardens to slow and filter storm water entering the lake.

Additionally, we are finalizing a contract for construction of storm water improvements along Majestic Circle.

### **Paving**

With the assistance of cutting-edge technology, the City has begun a paving plan to address roads in both the residential and commercial districts in 2022 and 2023. Within the plan, Laredo Drive has been identified as priority number one. The City has contracted with Pond Engineering to create a concept design and construction documents to fix the road and improve bike and pedestrian connections.

### **Police**

One of the things that I am most proud of this year has been the thorough process our city manager undertook to find our new police chief. After an extensive national search with the assistance of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police and support from community

stakeholders in the interview process, we were lucky to have found our next chief of police right down the road in Clarkston. Please help me welcome Harry Hess as the City's next chief of police. Chief Hess will take over the leadership of the City's police department next Tuesday, April 26. He brings with him a commitment to community policing, a desire to reestablish and grow the trust in our police department, not only within Avondale but with our surrounding communities, and a knowledge of DeKalb County that will enable him to hit the ground running. Under his leadership, I'm confident that Avondale will remain one of the safest communities in Georgia to live, visit and run a business.

### **Zoning**

Other monumental tasks we tackled in the last year include rewriting the city's old, antiquated zoning code and adopting new historic district design guidelines. With help from extensive community input, both the code and guidelines are clearer, easier to understand and leave less room for subjective interpretation. These efforts will pave the way for smart growth by giving residents, businesses and developers clear direction on site development and building design that aligns with our Downtown Master Plan and Comprehensive Plan, creating a connected community focused on new urban principles that help create an environment friendly to live, work and play.

### **Public Works**

The Public Works team's responsibilities continue to grow. Leaning into our history as the third oldest Tree City USA in Georgia, an inventory of the City's public trees was completed along with the development of a proactive management plan. This plan will save tax dollars by focusing on pruning, mulching and maintenance to keep trees alive and healthy rather than relying on reactive, more expensive removals of dying and diseased trees.

We recently entered into a unique recycling pilot program with SC Johnson and Nexus Circular that breaks down plastic bags and film to a molecular level and converts them into virgin plastic. Our residents have enthusiastically embraced this program, and we're proud to be the first city in the nation utilizing the most cutting-edge technology to close the loop on these hard to recycle items.

And finally, with the help of volunteers including the Gardeners for the Common Good, the Avon Garden Club, and the Avondale Estates Garden Club, we continue to beautify our garden city. The work done on rejuvenating the close to one hundred-year-old abelia hedge really illustrates the achievements that can be made through the partnership and collaboration between our community members and staff. Thanks to all for the impressive efforts.

### **Events**

Maybe the most enjoyable aspect of the past year has been the return to in-person events. We kicked off fall as a host and sponsor of Placita Latina's celebrations of Hispanic culture and heritage. October was a particularly full month. Stompfest returned, and for the first time, we hosted the MicroLife Institute Tiny House Festival which brought visitors to the city and showcased alternative dwelling ideas. Thousands of visitors hit the Dale Ale Trail on AvondALE

Day to enjoy a beautiful October weekend and sample the offerings of our three breweries, as well as The Beer Growler and My Parents' Basement. Winter Wonderland highlighted the City's arts community and businesses and delighted children with activities and holiday characters. And in March, Frühlingsfest celebrated the start of spring with record numbers of attendees.

And the festivities are just getting started. Just around the corner, we will kick off our events on the Green with our Weekend Wind Down concert series. Each Sunday evening in June at the Performance Pavilion, I invite you to spread out your picnic blanket and chairs, enjoy food trucks and your favorite beverages, and dance to blues, New Orleans brass bands and much more as we celebrate together. These Sunday gatherings will include a Juneteenth celebration and festivities in honor of National Pride Month. And mark your calendar as we move our beloved Fourth of July fireworks to the Green for a spectacular patriotic blowout.

These downtown events not only provide residents with fun outings, but they are smart business investments. They showcase our city to visitors and investors. When our businesses thrive, our downtown thrives, too.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my fellow commissioners, the Downtown Development Authority, our volunteer board and committee members, the city staff, our numerous partners, and especially you, the citizens of Avondale Estates. We are at a historic, transformative time in our city, bringing to life the vision we've worked together to create. Without your support and faith in us, we wouldn't have been able to engage in the long process and many decisions it's taken to build this special space, to push forward these monumental projects, and to build a community we are proud to call our own. Thank you!