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PRESS RELEASE

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Chairman Harry B. Johnston Delivers Annual 2025 State of Cherokee County Address *400+ Attended Annual Address & Lunch at Cherokee Conference Center*

CHEROKEE COUNTY, GA – On Wednesday, January 22, 2025, the Council for Quality Growth, [Cherokee County Government](#), and [Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce](#) hosted the 2025 State of Cherokee County Address at the Cherokee Conference Center in Canton. More than 400 Council and Chamber members, elected officials, business, residents, county staff, and partners of Cherokee County gathered to hear Commission Chairman Harry B. Johnston’s 7th State of the County address, along with updates from new school district Superintendent, Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis, and the final address from President of the Cherokee Office of Economic Development, Misti Martin. The lunch program was presented by [LGE Community Credit Union](#), [Northside Hospital Cherokee](#), and [VHB](#).

Cherokee County School District (CCSD) Superintendent Mary Elizabeth Davis spoke first, delivering her first since being elected to the role by the school board last June. She replaces Dr. Brian Hightower, who retired after 38 years as Superintendent last year. “A high performing school districts starts with a high performing board of education,” she began, commending the School Board for their “unmatched financial stewardship” and dedication to student success rates. CCSD leads the state in both graduation and college acceptance rates. She highlighted budget focal points for the coming fiscal year, including closing the compensation gap with neighboring school districts, ensuring employment stability across all school district jobs, and redirecting resources as close to the classroom as possible. Davis reported a 3% cut in spending at the district office already that has been routed to support student programs, like fine arts and STEM. She detailed her mission to “elevate the excellence” in academics, board governance, capital facilities, and safety and security. “There is no one better filling the halls and investing in young people than the teachers, leaders, and staff at schools in Cherokee County” she concluded.

Misti Martin then took to the stage for her final address after 21 years as President of the Cherokee Office of Economic Development (COED). She focused much of her speech on COED’s investment in people, entrepreneurship, and addressing workforce needs in Cherokee County. She highlighted the successes of “Be Pro Be Proud,” a local initiative that exposes students to needed skilled trade professions in their community. In 2025, COED made investments in attracting minority and international businesses, matched over 30 new ventures with mentors, and created entrepreneurial resources for individuals looking to start their business in Cherokee County. Martin reported over \$50 million in new investment last year, great strides with trails and greenspace, downtown development, sewer extensions, and great progress with sites and buildings for future investment. “Economic development projects are investments in people,” Martin said. “We must ensure high paying jobs by preserving land for business. If we don’t plan to have land for business, we’ll be out of business.” Martin was choked up as she concluded her final address on the State of the County stage.

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Chairman Johnston reported Cherokee’s projected a projected growth of 90,000 people over the next 20 years. He urged cities and counties to work together to help navigate the influx with agreed growth targets. He stressed the importance of preparedness and his openness to new plans. Johnston reported an annual need of \$43.8 million to maintain and upkeep the county’s road infrastructure, a quarter of which funds current projects in the 20-year Comprehensive Transportation Plan. The Chairman is considering ideas to increase this funding and support additional transportation projects such as the Homestead Option Sales Tax and a TSPLOST.

He also addressed the housing need, describing a delicate balance between creating affordable housing and ensuring responsible growth in Cherokee County. “I don’t want to live in a big, artificial, gated community,” said Chairman Johnston. “I want to live in a real community with real people that make up and are essential to that community.” He challenged his Board of Commissioners to preserve housing for residents of differing stages of life and household budgets. He concluded his address with a call to action. “Let’s keep Cherokee thriving,” he said. “Together, we can maintain Cherokee’s great services, low taxes, and great quality of life.”

The Council’s State of Cherokee County annually convenes the county’s business community with its local government bodies and other local leaders from across the region. Michael Paris, President & CEO of the Council for Quality Growth, opened the program and acknowledged the sponsors and elected officials present. “We’re proud to partner with Chairman Johnston, the school district, and the economic development officer here year-round, he said. “Our collaboration with the leadership here allows us to serve our members, make progress through quality growth and development, and add to an increasingly impressive quality of life in Cherokee County for residents and business alike.

The program also featured remarks from Ashley Rowe, Business Development Officer of LGE Community Credit Union, Katherine Pearson, Chief Operating Officer of Northside Hospital Cherokee, Tommy Crochet, Southeast Transportation Services Lead for VHB, and Danny Johnson, Director of the ARC’s Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District.



[From left: Dr. Mary Elizabeth Davis, Chairman Harry Johnston, Misti Martin, Michael Paris]

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[Chairman Harry Johnston delivers 2025 State of Cherokee Address]

View the full photo gallery at: <https://www.councilforqualitygrowth.org/photo-gallery-2025-state-of-cherokee-county/>.

About the State of the County/Agency Series

The Council for Quality Growth hosts 10 'State of' events across the region, including 8 counties and 2 agencies. We work in close collaboration with the office of the County Chairs in Cherokee, Clayton, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as with leadership at MARTA and the Atlanta BeltLine, to provide a platform for our counties and agency partners deliver an update on achievements, projects, and the future that is specifically geared toward the business community and the Council's membership. A full calendar of the Council's 2025 Signature Events, including the State of the County/Agency series, can be viewed and downloaded here: [2025 Programs Calendar](#)

About the Council for Quality Growth

The Council for Quality Growth is a trade organization that works to ensure continued growth and economic success for generations to come by providing advocacy, information, and education to its members. In its 40th year, the Council is committed to the mission of promoting balanced and responsible growth and is proactively involved in the formulation of policy and legislation critical to the growth and development industry. The Council addresses, head-on, strategic economic planning, infrastructure needs, and tough quality-of-life issues throughout the metro Atlanta region and state. For more information, please visit <http://www.councilforqualitygrowth.org>.

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