

2011 State of the County Address



**Joseph B. “Butch” Church, Chairman
Roanoke County Board of Supervisors
Thursday, November 3, 2011
Green Ridge Recreation Center**

“Investing in the Future”

Welcome and Introduction

Good morning and welcome to Roanoke County for this year’s State of the County Address. Ken Lanford, thank you for the kind introduction; I want to express my appreciation to the Roanoke Regional Chamber for sponsoring today’s event. I also want to recognize our color guard Riley McClure, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue; Dean Peroulas, Roanoke County Fire and Rescue; Jason McNamara, Roanoke County Police Dept. and Joe Mullins, Roanoke County Sheriff’s Dept. Thank you, gentlemen for a job well done.

Pastor Adrian Dowell, thank you so much for being here today. You are a true friend and your presence is very important to me.

I also want to recognize some very special people sitting at my table just in front of the stage. First, Mr. Pete Haislip and his wife Becky; Chief of Police, Ray Lavinder and his son Aaron; Doug and Carol Willoughby and St. Francis service dog Midas, and my good friend and Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Adrian Dowell. Each of you has a special meaning to me and also to Roanoke County. I am so pleased that you could be here this morning.

As I look around the room, I am delighted to see so many people in attendance today! Thanks to each of you for taking time out of your schedule to attend. I believe that your presence shows that you recognize the need for government, businesses and the citizens in our community to work together for the betterment of the Roanoke Valley.

This morning, I hope that you will leave this address feeling as energized and excited as I am about the future of Roanoke County and our region.

The first order of business will be to recognize and thank each Board of Supervisor member present today for their commitment and support. Please stand and remain standing for recognition: Vice-

Chairman Charlotte Moore-Cave Spring; Mike Altizer-Vinton and “Ed” Elswick–Windsor Hills. I want to also recognize our County Administrator, Clay Goodman; and Assistant County Administrators Diane Hyatt and Dan O’Donnell. Also with us today is our County Attorney Paul Mahoney.

Theme

Our theme for this year’s address is: “Investing in the Future.” Roanoke County takes pride in our accomplishments and our position in the State of Virginia as it relates to financial well being and our ability to plan for the future. Our Board of Supervisors and our dedicated employees have worked very hard to maintain our position in the region...and we are proud to say...our “citizens come first”.

We realize that we cannot be everything to everybody. Roanoke County covers over 250 square miles and we serve 93,000 citizens. Our successes begin and end with our people. More than ever before, our citizens are involved in our day-to-day operations and our plans for the future.

Transparency has been our operative word as we share more and more information via our new website and publications.

Financial Analysis

I begin my comments today starting with the financial status of the County. Our country has experienced difficult economic conditions; yet the fiscal strength of Roanoke County remains strong.

That is why I am happy to tell you that Roanoke County's budget is balanced...and has been balanced each year for many years.

The year's budget will show:

- No increases in the real estate tax rate
- Strong and continued support for Education and Public Safety
- And to maintain our core services to our citizens...even during difficult financial times

In July, Roanoke County received a positive review from Standard & Poor's. We received a one notch increase to AA + (plus). The upgrade reflects the County's consistently good economic growth and sound financial practices.

This strong rating is great news and will continue to allow the County to borrow funds as needed at low interest rates. It also sends a signal that we are doing a lot of things "right" in Roanoke County!

Budget

Now I want to talk a bit about our budget. Over the last several years, our budget development has been one of the most challenging that Roanoke County has ever experienced. Our goal is to maintain financial integrity and consistent levels of services for our residents and business owners. We have tightened our belt and have been operating more efficiently than ever.

We continue to have a hiring freeze in effect, to limit travel and look for cost cutting measures. At the same time, we are committed to maintain an adequate “rainy day” fund in case of extreme circumstances. As of June 30, 2011, we have an Unappropriated Fund Balance of \$20.1 million. What does the immediate future look like for Roanoke County? The answer is much the same as other county governments. We are proceeding with caution; keeping a watchful eye on the General Assembly in Richmond, especially relating to local governments taking back maintenance of secondary roads. If this is passed, all localities will be impacted in a negative way. Our General Assembly can be a “one-man wrecking crew” to any county’s budget, and Roanoke County stays on “high alert” when preparing our budget.

One day, our budget looks pretty good...and then bad news comes from Richmond that sends us back to the drawing board. So, in the final analysis, if Richmond leaves us alone as far as drastic cuts in revenue are concerned...we can hold our own. Roanoke County is doing quite well, if you look around at other localities for comparison. We are providing quality core services for our citizens.

As I talked about in last year's address, if the cost of our value added core services....full-time Police Department, full-time Fire and Rescue Department and curbside trash and bulk collection...are subtracted....then Roanoke County's tax rate is equal to or lower than surrounding localities who do NOT provide these services!

This information is worth mentioning again this year, because when you compare "apples to apples"...Roanoke County stands tall.

Comm IT

Another area that the County is proud of is our Department of Communications and Information Technology.

The County's Department of Communications and Information Technology (we refer to this department as Comm IT) has made several advances this year that have created a solid foundation for our technology and customer services systems. This department has

worked with many other agencies to improve customer service without incurring a major impact on the County's financial bottom line.

In March of this year, the County launched a brand new website. The initiative was lead by Comm IT and the Public Information Office. It included guidance from our Board of Supervisors and participation from every department in the County.

The new site has been widely regarded as attractive and user friendly. It provides a powerful search engine and dozens of new services and features to help the citizens and businesses in Roanoke County to get online instead of inline. We listened to our citizens who told us that they wanted a user-friendly site that they could negotiate easily. I am happy to report that:

- This new site has been recognized as a winner in the Center for Digital Government's 2010 Best of The Web Contest
- In September, Roanoke County was recognized with a Governor's Technology Award for this new website
- This past year, the Police Department and Comm IT entered into a regional data sharing system that helps identify criminal activity that spans local boundaries.

July 1st of this year marked the first anniversary of our partnership with Vinton in operating a combined 9-1-1 Center. This continues to be an ongoing success, as we have seen cost savings, cost avoidance and an improved level of response.

This year, we are also embarking on an exciting new collaboration with our neighbors in Roanoke City. When they complete their transition to digital radio, we will jointly own, operate and maintain a regional state-of-the-art radio system. This will provide reliability and safety to all of our first responders, keeping us ahead of the curve in the crucial area of communications.

I want to congratulate Comm IT and our Public Information Department for its extensive support for all agencies in the County. You are doing a great job providing the tools and customer service necessary to carry us well into the future.

Police Department

Our Police Department once again distinguished itself as one of the very best in the state of Virginia!

Under the leadership of Chief Ray Lavinder the department has quite a list of accomplishments, including:

- Construction of a firearms range and a driver training center near Dixie Caverns
- Established the Roanoke County Criminal Justice Academy, the first independent training academy in Virginia in nearly 30 years
- Earned and maintained national accreditation
- Created the school resource officer program in Roanoke County
- Developed one of the best Animal Control programs in the state
- Put into place programs to better address cases involving the mentally ill

Chief Lavinder will be remembered for accomplishing many great things, but the case he will no doubt always be associated with is that of 12-year-old Brittany Mae Smith. Ray was widely praised for the high visibility, professionalism and calm demeanor throughout the five-day search for the missing child and her abductor. He and his staff are dedicated to the safety and welfare of Roanoke County's children. In May of this year, Roanoke County Police Detective Chris Welch and the Department were recognized by John Walsh and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for their work to bring the child safely home and apprehend her abductor.

Just a short time later, in June of this year, four County Officers worked with citizens (one of which was a 9-year-old girl) to save the life of a 4-year-old boy who had fallen into a swimming pool in a County apartment complex. The officers and the citizens were publicly praised by our Board of Supervisors and each received a signed letter from US Senator Mark Warner acknowledging their heroic actions.

Now, I want you to meet one of finest gentlemen you will ever meet...our Chief of Police Ray Lavinder...Ray, would you come up on stage with me please.

Ray's retirement became effective on Tuesday of this week, November 1st. He began his law enforcement career in 1972 with the Arlington County Police Department. In 1979, Ray left Arlington to begin what would become a long and distinguished career with Roanoke County. He spent the first seven years as a Detective. In 1987, he was promoted to Lieutenant and supervised the Detective Bureau. When the Roanoke County Police Department was formed in 1990, Ray was promoted to Captain of the Criminal Investigations Division. In June 1997 he was selected as Roanoke County Police Chief.

I want to tell you a little more about Ray. He served as President of the Virginia Association of Police Chiefs from 2007-2008. He served

one tour in Vietnam with the US Army...with the 716 MP Battalion - one of the most decorated units in the Military Police Corps.

Ray is a true gentleman, one who leads quietly and gives credit to others. Everyone respects Ray Lavinder...when he talks...people listen. He will be very difficult to replace.

Ray and his wife Erma have one grown son, Aaron.

Another thing that you should know about Ray Lavinder is that he really does not like much attention. But Ray....I hope you will forgive me for telling this audience that today is your birthday! Mention some cupcakes for Ray to share after this address.

Ray, I took this opportunity to honor you....especially on your birthday....for two reasons.....(1)...you are a very special person both to me and to the County of Roanoke....and (2)...I know that you are officially retired...and cannot arrest me for telling about your birthday!

Ladies and Gentlemen...let's show Chief Ray Lavinder our appreciation for his dedicated service to Roanoke County.

Roanoke County Fire and Rescue

To continue with public safety the Roanoke County Fire and Rescue Department won two significant State-wide recognitions during

2011. The Department received the Governor's Award for Outstanding EMS Agency, the highest honor possible.

The second award came in the form of a grant to support volunteer firefighter recruitment. The Virginia Fire Chiefs Association chose the County's Fire/Rescue Department as one of 20 agencies statewide to participate in the Volunteer Workforce Solutions Program.

Economic Development

Now, I want to switch gears and talk about our Economic Development Department. Roanoke County experienced moderate economic development growth in fiscal year 2011 due in part to:

- The opening of the Clearbrook WalMart in the Cave Spring area
- Relocation of the Miller-Motte Technical Center to Tanglewood Mall
- Further development of the Catawba Sustainability Center

The resurgence in the establishment of small businesses to the area suggests a recovering local economy and a potential for increases in sales tax revenues. This year Roanoke County participated in fourteen ribbon cuttings for small business openings.

We continue to actively pursue potential new businesses for location in the County. We also have been more than willing to

participate with our neighboring localities getting new companies to locate in the Roanoke Region....realizing that when one location wins...we ALL win!

Our Board of Supervisors presented proclamations to (2) of our most outstanding businesses in the County: Grand Home Furnishings for celebrating 100 years in business....and AmRheins, who reached another milestone of 90 years in business...folks when you can operate any business for 90 and 100 years....it says volumes about your organization, customer service, loyal and continuous customers....and especially about continuing family traditions! Congratulations again to Grand Home Furnishings and AmRheins...what an accomplishment!!!

Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center

Now, I want to spend a few minutes speaking about a “project for the future...as we continue to invest in the future”. This project is a perfect example of what can be accomplished with everyone working together. The Sustainability Center is on 377 acres in the Catawba Valley. The primary goal of the Catawba Sustainability Center is to establish a productive, sustainable and self-supporting enterprise that serves as a model for future farms in Virginia and the mid-Atlantic region; and supports the rural economic development goals of the

residents of Catawba. Virginia Tech has agreed to grant Roanoke County a twenty-five (25) year lease agreement for the purposes of maintaining, constructing and managing the Blue Blaze trail. This connection will serve as a portion of the Catawba Greenway and will provide hikers with a safe and convenient access between the Appalachian Trail and the Catawba community. Additionally, Virginia Tech has committed to constructing hostels at the CSC to provide overnight accommodations for hikers. A special thanks to Christy Gabbard, Director of the Catawba Sustainability Center for her tireless efforts in helping us invest in the future. Christy does a magnificent job for this community.

Green Ridge/Pete Haislip

While continuing with outdoor activities, I want to recognize our Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department for another outstanding year. Once again, our Green Ridge Recreation Center had another great year; check these numbers out...over 500 birthday parties; 52,000 visits to Splash Valley; participation doubled in our summer camp program, current membership of 8,064 members, fiscal year revenue \$2,740,224...covering our expenses (2) years ahead of schedule. This is really great news...keep it up folks!

There is more big news in this department; Pete Haislip is retiring effective January 1, 2012. At this time, I want to introduce the new director, Mr. Doug Blount...a native of the Roanoke Valley. Doug, please stand to be recognized. Doug, we wish you much success and have lots of confidence in you.

Now I want to bring our main attraction up on stage with me...Pete, will you join me please? Pete has done a truly outstanding job for Roanoke County. He has given the County the last 18 years of his life...literally going full steam day and night. Pete was formerly at Prince William County Park Authority in northern Virginia. He brought enthusiasm and a desire to make Roanoke County Parks and Recreation the best it can be! He has that "can do attitude" and works tirelessly to complete every item on his list. This GRRC is Pete's special interest and one of his most successful projects...the numbers speaks for themselves.

One crowning moment for Pete occurred in September of this year when he was presented the Virginia Recreation and Park Society Distinguished Service Award! It is only given to those individuals who have demonstrated leadership and innovation at both the community and regional levels in the parks and recreation field. Pete and his group

have been honored many times over the years and I will put this group up against anybody...anywhere...any day! Pete and his wife Becky have a lovely family and we wish you the most joyful and rewarding retirement.

Libraries

I cannot think of a better place to “invest in the future”...than our libraries. This year is turning out to be a watershed year for the Roanoke County Public Library, as The South County Library, the new headquarters facility, nears completion...and construction of the new Glenvar Branch Library gets underway.

The finishing touches are being put on the South County Library, which will open in early January 2012. This location will be almost 54,000 square feet, more than twice the size of the current site on Rt. 419...and unlike any location in this region and possibly the State. In addition to wide open spaces and abundant natural light, South County will also have the following features that were not available at the old location:

- Drive-thru book pick-up/drop-off window
- Outdoor plaza with seating
- Two spacious, state-of-the art meeting rooms

- A 200-seat auditorium
- A coffee shop with drive-up window and indoor seating

South County will have 223 parking spaces...almost double the previous number. The children's area will be greatly expanded, with a unique story time room that both children and parents will love.

Glenvar Branch Library

During the three public meetings earlier this year with our Glenvar citizens, we discussed what they wanted in their new library. During these meetings, citizens asked the County to find temporary library space for them to use while the new one is being built. The current library closed on August 19th and a temporary library was opened in the former King's Florist building on West Main Street.

At a special ceremony on September 29th, we honored the service of the former library, which opened in 1979. There was a special flag-lowering ceremony with our patrons of the library; citizens both young and old came to say "good bye" and excitement for the new library got underway!

Construction of the new 15,150 square-foot Glenvar Library will begin any day now. Holzheimer, Bolek & Meehan Architects (HB+M) of Cleveland, Ohio was selected through competitive bid to design the

structure. HB+M is also the architect of the South County Library and they have designed more than 200 libraries in the United States. The final plan incorporates these amenities, which include:

- Drive-thru book drop-off/pick-up window
- 77-seat dividable meeting room
- Local history room
- 27 public computers
- Individual study rooms
- Lots of glass and natural light; great mountain views
- Covered drive-up near the entrance of library
- 70 parking spaces, with accessible parking spaces next to building

Other Libraries

Also this year the Board of Supervisors approved the purchase of approximately two acres on which the Mt. Pleasant Branch Library resides and improvements are now underway. Working with the Town of Vinton, the Supervisors also approved the acquisition of property for a new Vinton Branch Library in downtown Vinton. The new library is part of Vinton's vision for the future of their downtown area. Although construction is still some years away, the new Vinton library is expected

to be approximately 18,000 square feet in size. The current library was built in 1969 and is the oldest in the system.

Schools

In Roanoke County, we feel that we have the best School system in the State. Our teachers and administrators are second to none and we are extremely proud to have a close relationship with our School Board Members. We are indeed partners as we continue to put our children first!

I want to share with you two projects that are special to the area that I serve; the New Masons Cove Elementary School and the newly renovated Northside High School.

If you will look on the visuals...you can see the “before and the after”...I don’t want to steal any thunder from my counter-part on the School Board....Chairman Wymer.....so I will stop there.

These improvements are also an investment in the future – an investment in our children and grandchildren – and a reflection of Roanoke County’s commitment to public education.

It is my pleasure now to introduce the Chairman of the Roanoke County School Board, Mr. David Wymer to update you on Roanoke County schools.

Conclusion

What sets Roanoke County apart is not simply the commitment to our schools; public safety; quality of life and outstanding delivery of services.

It's a willingness to act on our commitments, to make big decisions, to take bold steps forward and to invest in our future. We remain committed to all these interests in Roanoke County. But, more importantly, we take the necessary actions to turn our commitments into real achievements. Our continuing goal is to make Roanoke County a wholesome place to live, work and raise a family.

Again, thank you for being here this morning. You represent the best and the brightest of this valley and without you many of our achievements may not have been possible.