

**Mayor Bob Coble  
State of the City Speech  
February 12, 2004**

**Welcome**

Thank you Charlie and thank all of you for being here tonight. I want to welcome you on behalf of the members of Columbia City Council: E.W. Cromartie, Anne Sinclair, Jim Papadea, Hamilton Osbourne, Sam Davis, Tameika Devine, our City Manager Charles Austin and myself. I would like to recognize my wife Beth who is here.

Columbia is going through a great renaissance. For more than a decade, Columbia has experienced dynamic growth and significant improvements in the quality of life for all our citizens. Columbia's renaissance is the result of strategic changes that have occurred through hard work, commitment, and leadership.

**Recognition and Thanks**

The City has hundreds of hardworking employees whose dedication and commitment make Columbia a great place to live and work. Tonight we have invited the Employees of the Month for 2003 to join us. Please join me in saying thank you to them and all of the City employees.

The staff and City are blessed with a tremendous leader in City Manager Charles Austin. Charles Austin was the best police chief in America. He

revolutionized the fight against crime with community based policing. He has brought the same dedication and steady hand to the City as City Manager. The past year Charles Austin has brought us together, and moved us forward. Thank you Chief. Let me also recognize his wife Ava.

The progress we are making is because of the partnership we have with the neighborhoods and the neighborhood leaders. Everything we do in Columbia is measured against how it improves our neighborhoods. Tonight we have invited the Neighborhood Presidents to be here and I would ask that they stand now to be recognized.

The progress we are making is the result of clear and strategic partnerships: the University of South Carolina, Benedict College, Allen University, Columbia College, The River Alliance, Richland School District One, the Columbia Housing Authority, Richland County Council, Lexington County Council, the Chamber of Commerce, the Central Carolina Economic Development Alliance, Midlands Technical College, our Legislature, the Budget and Control Board, the State Department of Transportation and others. I want to thank Commissioner John Hardee for his tireless work for Columbia.

I want to personally thank Dr. Sorensen, President of the University of South Carolina, for his leadership in the renaissance of the City.

I want to personally thank Congressman Clyburn for all that he has done from the HOPE VI to the Empowerment Zone. His contributions have and will transform the City.

At City Hall we are a team. Columbia City Council works together with mutual respect for each other. I want to thank all of Council for their dedication and leadership.

Finally, the lion's share of the credit for our renaissance goes to the citizens of Columbia, who go to work everyday, raise the kids, and dream the dreams.

### **Progress of the Last Decade**

We are fortunate to be here at this moment in our City's history. My fellow citizens, the state of our City is strong. The progress our City has made over the last ten years has been remarkable. Our progress is real. Columbia's renaissance no longer requires faith to believe, only eyes to see. Tonight it is appropriate to take stock of Columbia's renaissance; to measure our success, but more importantly to chart our course for the future. While tonight's remarks are my own, the accomplishments (pause) we have done together.

We can measure our progress in two key areas.

## Neighborhoods

First, the quality of life in our neighborhoods has improved dramatically. This progress can be measured by the 2000 Census: for the first time in thirty years, the past decade saw home ownership rise, more people are moving into the city, and property values are increasing. The commitment we have made to housing, with our plan for increasing home ownership through our public-private partnership with local lending institutions has worked. In 2000 we initiated a second five-year Housing Initiative, with a \$55 million loan pool. City Dreams in Waverly is an excellent example of how one of Columbia's oldest neighborhoods can be revitalized. Rosewood Hills will be Columbia's next neighborhood. Run-down hotels along Two Notch Road now provide affordable apartments.

Columbia is a safer place to live. In the early 1990s, the crime rate was not a source of pride. Today, the actual number of crimes has decreased more than 25% over the last decade, with a much sharper decline on a per capita basis. This past year alone, crime, both violent and property fell 8%. Under Charles Austin's leadership and the backing of City Council, we have instituted community based policing, increased the number of officers, established residential patrol officers, hired community safety officers, and funded an assistant solicitor. We are confronting the emerging problem of gangs with the gang interdiction unit and we

are lobbying for the pending gang legislation, which will help put an end to the fear these criminals are putting in residents.

Domestic violence remains a great challenge and a top priority. In 1994 the City instituted a “no-drop” policy, and in May 2000 our criminal domestic violence Court began. In this year’s budget we should add officers who have been trained as specialists in domestic violence.

We have also made great strides making Columbia more secure from the threat of terrorism. As the Capital City and the home of Fort Jackson, we must be prepared. Our first responders: police, fire, and 911 are ready.

Neighborhoods are cleaner and more attractive. We are targeting dilapidated houses and have passed stricter zoning and housing codes. We are targeting nuisances in neighborhoods with more effective ordinances. Additionally, we have undertaken, with the help of a number of partners, such as Congressman Clyburn, to renovate and restore entire neighborhoods and communities such as Waverly, Saxon Homes, Hendley Homes, Rosewood Drive and Read Street. We have slowed traffic down in our City neighborhoods. We have passed a permanent financing for drainage improvements. We passed a landscape ordinance to preserve Columbia’s beauty for the next generation.

Columbia’s neighborhoods are what make Columbia a great place to live. Our neighborhoods will always be our top priority. Columbia is a renaissance city.

## **Economic Renaissance**

In the face of a unprecedented job losses affecting the State, Columbia has been strengthening and expanding its economic infrastructure. Ten years ago our economic development efforts were virtually non-existent. Then Chairman of the Development Board, John Warren, told me that Columbia was just not competitive. This Council took action. We helped create the Central Carolina Economic Development Alliance with our neighbors, and today we compete as a nine county region. We also established an Economic Development Office to concentrate and focus on economic development opportunities and leverage our strong water and sewer infrastructure that supports the Region. We began and have sustained an aggressive effort to attract foreign investment, with an emphasis on Germany that has brought significant new manufacturing and production jobs to the Columbia region. We are now working on a plan to create an International Business Center in Columbia where currently four (4) German companies are ready to locate and where there will be opportunities for others to enter into the attractive US market. The 2000 Census showed the Columbia Metropolitan Statistical Area has grown to be the largest in South Carolina.

The heart of Columbia has been revitalized. Vacant department stores were the issue for downtown Columbia ten years ago; the Vista was an experiment; and the riverfront development was a dream. Today those dreams are realities. The

City Center Design Guidelines and the Design Development Review Commission have assured consistent and quality development. We have new attractions such as USC's Colonial Center, EdVenture, the Columbia Art Museum, and the Three Rivers Greenway. CanalSide and Canal Front are underway. The Belks Building is now the Carolina First Building and Boyd Plaza; Macy's is the Columbia Museum of Art; the Kress, the Berry's and the Tapp's Buildings are apartments that are fully occupied. Private investment, both residential and commercial, has exploded throughout the City. City Center Partnership, our business improvement district, under the leadership of Matt Kennell, has brought a new sense of vibrancy to Downtown. The Magnolia Market has been a great success, and the Clean Teams and Safety Guides are now Downtown fixtures. The Meridian Building on Main Street will open in April, and there will be even bigger announcements for Main Street in the next couple of weeks. We even have that elusive downtown grocery store under construction in a historic building that was neglected for many years. The fact that we have had so much construction in the City during the tough economic times of the early 2000's speaks volumes about our future. Today, hand wringing has been replaced with construction cranes and ribbon cuttings.

Ten years ago we did not have a strategic relationship with the University of South Carolina. Today the new USC Research Campus is under construction. We have entered the technology and information economy, and our partnership with

the University of South Carolina and the implementation of our Technology Strategic Plan that will transform Columbia's economy and create high wage jobs.

Ten years ago the possibility of a convention center would have brought a chuckle; the grand opening will be in August. The Columbia Hilton will be open a year later. We started on a path to build an arena, a convention center, new streets and infrastructure to support those venues and a convention center hotel. We have done it. Ten years ago we talked about a unified marketing plan to attract visitors and conventions; today we have one. We are Columbia the Riverbanks Region. We are doing all of this for one reason: to create jobs and strengthen our economy. We are making conventions and visitors a larger part of our economy.

The last ten years have seen a strengthening of our partnerships with Benedict College, Allen University, and Columbia College. The last ten years have seen Benedict grow and flourish. The redevelopment of the area has been dramatic. Ten years ago there was no John Hurst Adams Gym and Arnette Hall was in need of repair at Allen. Columbia College has seen growth and new facilities and has been ranked for years by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the top comprehensive undergraduate colleges in the South.

Fort Jackson, America's premier training post has grown over the last decade with more permanent party personnel and modern facilities. We are

fighting hard to protect and grow Fort Jackson's mission in the latest round of BRAC.

Ten years ago Read Street was in trouble. Today it is a magnificent neighborhood. In 1993 the Eau Claire Town Hall was a liquor store and the Print Building, or what was left of it, was falling down. Now it is a wonderful meeting hall. Ten years ago Devine Street and Rosewood Drive were thought of only as roads, and now they are centers of retail. Ten years ago the bus system was a disgrace, and now we have the Regional Transit Authority, and yes, trolleys. Ten years ago the Gervais Street streetscaping project was controversial. Today, that project has transformed the economic vitality of the heart of the City and has led to millions of dollars in private investment. Today, our Main Street, North Main Street, Harden Street/Five Points, Two Notch Road, and Lady Street streetscaping projects are underway. We are beginning the transformation of Farrow Road with new retail and housing.

We have more things to do for recreation in Columbia. You can watch a hockey game and ice skate afterwards. My hope is that one-day, we along with our children can go to a Gamecock or Bomber baseball game in a new facility. The Three Rivers Music Festival is now part of our cultural fabric. The arts are flourishing in Columbia. Main Street will increasingly be the center for art venues, such as the Columbia Museum of Art. The new additions of the Bethel AME

Church restoration and Work Shop Theater in the Republic Bank Building on Main St. will strengthen the growth of the arts in Columbia. The Historic Columbia Foundation plans are exciting and will be a great boost for visitors. And Nickelodean Movie Theater plans a new location in the central city.

No matter how you define it, Columbia really is a renaissance city.

All of this progress was not without controversy or legitimate disagreement. The public private initiatives must stand on their own merit after thorough review. But one thing is clear. The last decade has brought a renaissance to our City. Columbia ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in the nation by Forbes Magazine for our business climate in May 2003. The Pulitzer Prize winning journalist with the *Washington Post*, David Broder described our City recently in his column: “... *Columbia has a lot going for it. A new convention center and hotel are under way. The university is expanding its research center and is designated as a national center for fuel cell development. The old warehouse district has been revived and looks like Boston or San Francisco, with its apartments and restaurants.*”

All of this progress has been made with a strong commitment to providing excellent basic services: law enforcement, fire protection, public works, water, and sewer. All of this progress has occurred with an expanding tax base.

And all of this progress has occurred with a City tax rate virtually unchanged in a decade. All of this progress has occurred with a strong and consistent bond

rating. Each year for the last ten years the City has received the Certificate of Achievement, the highest recognition in government accounting and financial reporting. We are also achieving this economic revival with a strong commitment- and the track record to prove it- to economic diversity and inclusion.

### **Agenda for the Future**

We should all take pride in these clear indications of progress, but no one should become complacent or conclude that our challenges are behind us. But like the beginning of a long journey, ten years ago Columbia's road ahead looked uncertain, with our destination unclear. But through hard work, commitment, resources, and strong leadership the road ahead for Columbia is clear, our arrival certain and more secure than ever.

Where does Columbia's Renaissance go from here? We must continue to pursue a more vibrant, more attractive City with a stronger economy. My vision for Columbia is of a great place to live, work, and visit. A Columbia with a high tech economy, producing high paying jobs.

Columbia is a city of the New South. The vision of Columbia must be characterized by fairness and openness for all citizens so that all will share in our expanded prosperity. We must continue to appreciate that diversity is a strength. We must continue to know that mutual respect leads to mutual progress. We are working hard and must continue to insure that locally owned and small businesses,

including minority and female-owned companies, can participate in our economic progress. We must also make sure that geographically *all* parts of Columbia are revitalized – not just the Vista, Five Points and Downtown. This requires innovative thinking: like the Golf Center at Sligh Avenue, a wellness program at Drew Park, new homes in Waverly, high-tech industry in Rosewood, and “Kernels and Crème” in Eau Claire. The challenges we face are great, but our commitment and determination are greater. We must continue to provide excellent basic services within a reasonable budget. We must continue to fight crime and strengthen our neighborhoods. We must continue to support the programs to provide for the homeless. We must complete all of these projects.

## **Technology**

But what is the agenda for the future? We must set for ourselves a number of key strategic goals. We must set priorities that a generation from now will make a difference. Let me be clear about our greatest challenge. In today’s highly competitive global economy, the number one goal must be to strengthen the economy and create jobs.

First, we must enter the information and technology economy to be successful. Governor Sanford and a group of South Carolina businessmen and businesswomen commissioned noted Harvard Professor Michael Porter to study the State’s economy. The study concluded that South Carolina has pursued a low-

cost economic strategy, emphasizing the abundant and flexible workforce, good infrastructure, and responsive government in order to attract manufacturing operations. While successful in creating jobs, it has been less successful in raising the standard of living in South Carolina. South Carolina's per capita income is 80% of the national average and our growth in wages over the past decade was below the national average.

Additionally we are losing jobs because of the poor national economy and off shoring of American jobs. South Carolina has lost 41,000 jobs since December 2002, and the Columbia region, historically insulated because of State government, the University and Fort Jackson, has lost over 10,000 jobs. While the Columbia economy is strong - the Downtown office market is the strongest in the region and our unemployment has always been among the lowest in the State - our challenge today is to create more high-paying jobs.

As a nation we are facing the prospect of a jobless economy. An economy where companies are doing well, growth is occurring, but jobs are not being created, at least not in the United States. The causes of this lack of job growth are not the normal business cycles of downturns and recoveries. There are structural changes that will make these job losses escalate and be permanent. Jobs are being sent offshore; the State is cutting jobs because of the budget shortfalls; the military is downsizing; and increasingly technology will reduce employment.

A new strategy is required. In Columbia this means focusing on technology. In 2002 the City of Columbia began a strategic plan for technology. We presented that plan in February of last year at our Technology Summit. We have accomplished all of the six-month goals. Last year the City of Columbia, the USC Foundation, and local businesses hired the developer of Centennial Campus in Raleigh at North Carolina State University, to do a study for a proposed University of South Carolina research campus. Dr. Sorensen has announced Phase I that will add 420,000 square feet of space for research and development with an investment of \$56 million. The USC research campus is underway.

Dr. Harris Pastides announced the cluster areas of technology we are prioritizing, such as fuel cell research and nanoscience. Last June, USC received the National Science Foundation designation as the only Industry/University Cooperative Research Center in the nation for fuel cells, and in December, USC hired Professor Webb, a member of the National Academy of Sciences for nanoscience. The Midlands Technology Directory is completed; and the Columbia Regional Technology Council, now EngenuitySC, under Neil McLean's leadership, is moving full speed ahead. In cooperation with USC, we created the Columbia/USC Technology Incubator. Additionally, USC Business Link is in place; we launched our first WiFi hot spot, and soon Columbia will be covered by wireless Internet access. The City of Columbia has entered into a contract with The

Trelys Fund, the first and only venture capital fund in Columbia. Trelys will seek to attract at least \$6 million in investment capital for emerging technology companies in the City. Unitrends, which will provide the city with 60 new jobs, was our first announcement. We are also currently exploring the creation of a Technology Center where emerging companies can locate near each other in a collaborative environment and enjoy low overhead and technology focused infrastructure to enhance their chances for success.

Our challenge is clear. We must complete the USC Research Campus. We must develop additional sources of investment capital. We must create a business environment that supports entrepreneurship. We must connect business to higher education and research. The City must complete our economic strategic plan. The potential for economic growth led by cutting edge technology and locally owned businesses can change Columbia and our economy more than any other factor in our history. When the break through in fuel cell research occurs, literally saving the world from global warming and oil dependence, that technological advance and the economic growth that comes with it, will occur here in Columbia. Local government, educational institutions, and the business community are all ready and prepared to work arm in arm. The vehicle for doing all of this is Engenuity and our task is to implement the technology strategic plan.

## **Education and Workforce Training**

Secondly, all of these great plans and progress to create jobs will be for nothing, if our citizens, and in particular our youth, are not trained and equipped to fill those jobs. The challenge in Columbia, as well as South Carolina, is to insure that our citizens are trained to fill the jobs that are available today as well as the jobs of the future. When we travel the United States and Europe on economic development missions, the most frequently asked question is whether the company can find the trained and skilled workers to fill the advanced manufacturing jobs we are seeking. The City of Columbia must take a leadership role in insuring that we have that trained workforce.

The City currently is heavily involved in education and training: the Commission on Children and Youth, YouthWork, Introduction to Engineering, Kids City/Kids Day, the Summer Intern/Shadowing Program, the After School Program, the After School Teen Program, and the Get Set program, an adult education program for City employees, are all great success stories. These programs must continue and be strengthened.

There are two programs that I believe can have a dramatic impact on our citizens' ability to fill the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow. One year ago the City launched a Work Initiative Program that targets and trains men and women to become skilled craftsmen in the construction industry. This program trains people

to fill jobs that currently exist. We have had three graduation classes with almost 100 graduates. This program has an excellent retention rate and we have seen the dramatic life changes it provides the graduates.

The second program is the School-to-Work Partnership of the Midlands Education and Business Alliance. The Alliance was founded in 1990 and is one of sixteen School-to-Work consortiums in South Carolina. The Alliance's mission is to partner with business, communities, and schools to insure that high school graduates are prepared, through internships and training, to enter the workforce. It is clear that business is changing much faster than education in South Carolina and those changes have resulted in an enormous mismatch between education and workforce needs. Sixty-five (65%) percent of jobs in South Carolina require a two-year degree and technical skills, yet only thirty-two (32%) of high school students are preparing to attend technical college. Employers in the Columbia region cannot find qualified candidates to fill the jobs that exist now. Palmetto Health's nurses are recruited from out of state, and Siemens Diesel is spending millions to recruit and relocate workers to fill their advanced manufacturing jobs at their new plant. Our children and our neighbors should fill these high-paying jobs, but they must have the skills they need to meet the job's requirements.

The Alliance has a broad base with the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce, college presidents, school superintendents, and business leaders. The

Alliance has been nationally recognized. An example of the partnership is with Siemens Diesel and Richland District One. In Germany we saw what apprenticeships mean. The funding for the Alliance was started with a federal grant that ends this year. Its success is clear. I would propose that the City take a leadership role in working with the Alliance's partners in funding and insuring that this program continues and flourishes.

Tonight we have with us Cedric Brown. Three years ago when he was a student at Heyward Career Center, Cedric became an intern at Total Comfort Heating and Air, after Jim Reynolds the President of Total Comfort and immediate past chair of the Alliance spoke to Cedric's class about the Alliance's intern program. Cedric is now a sophomore at Midlands Technical College. After completing his degree in Heating and Air, he plans to attend USC and remain in the field. Cedric has a great career ahead of him and Jim has had a great employee. I would ask that Cedric and Jim stand and be recognized.

### **East Central Consortium**

Thirdly, we must continue to revitalize our City. Jobs and growth will occur only in places where the quality of life is inviting and attractive. Investments will occur in places that make those investments secure. The Vista and many neighborhoods are exploding with growth. Our commitment to housing with the

extension of another five-year plan in 2000 has produced results. That revival must continue to all parts of the City.

The East Central City Consortium, a non-profit organization developing affordable housing in Columbia's downtown neighborhoods is the vehicle we must use to dramatically improve those neighborhoods and bring in more single-family housing. Twelve neighborhood organizations are represented in the Consortium along with Benedict and Allen and a host of other partners. The study area encompasses over 800 acres of existing urban property. This area represents the heart and soul of Columbia. It represents great history and with work, a great future. The planning is nearly complete. Catalyst projects have been identified for each of the five cluster areas. Those projects represent a transformation of an entire part of Columbia. Our challenge on Council is to support those projects. We must establish priorities and work with our partners. We must have a long-term commitment to this process.

### **Mental Health Property**

Additionally, rarely does a city have an area as large as the Mental Health property on Bull Street in the heart of the City available for redevelopment. The 178-acre site is the single largest opportunity for Columbia's growth that we have ever had. The property will be declared surplus in 2005 and available for purchase. The City will work closely with the State and potential developers to insure that

the development is consistent with the surrounding neighborhoods. The City will update its City Center Master Plan to include this property. We should focus on creating another neighborhood. It will be a highly collaborative process with the surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. The property has a number of historic buildings that will add value to the development.

## **Conclusion**

Columbia is experiencing a great renaissance. Together we have created a stronger and better Columbia. Together we have created a City that counts diversity as a strength. Together we have created a City of strong neighborhoods and a strong economic base.

Together we will strengthen our economy by entering the new technology economy; by making sure our citizens are prepared for the jobs of the future; and by continuing the revitalization of the entire City. The days of “what ifs” and “if only” and “they do it there” are over. As a City our greatest days are ahead.

Thank you for being here tonight.