

Charlie Reece: Remarks to the City Council Announcing My Resignation

Thank you, and good evening to you Mayor O'Neal, and to all of my wonderful city council colleagues. Good evening to our world class city staff, led by city manager Wanda Page, city attorney Kimberly Rehberg and city clerk Diana Schreiber, and each and every one of our amazing City of Durham employees. And last but absolutely, positively not least, good evening to the people of our beloved city of Durham. For the last 2,267 days, you have placed in me your trust and confidence to serve as a member of this Durham City Council. I have worked as hard as I know how every single one of those days to earn that trust and confidence. I hope you know that.

The sacred text of my personal faith tells us that to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.

Friends, my time and my season in service on this Durham City Council have meant the world to me. But tonight, I'm announcing that my time and my season on this council will come to an end on Monday, March 7th, 2022, two weeks from tonight, when I hope my colleagues will vote to accept my letter of resignation from the Durham City Council.

I've asked the mayor if I could talk for just a little bit longer than usual tonight and she has graciously agreed, so please bear with me. After all, this is probably one of the last times y'all will have to listen to me talk, so thank you in advance for your patience.

Now why in the world am I leaving the best job I have ever had? Why would I ever want to leave this incomparable, impossible job?

Well, actually it's pretty simple. Early last year, our family business began exploring the idea of buying a European company in order to expand our business opportunities there. Two months ago, we did just that, and as a result, our Chief Executive Officer, who also happens to be my lovely wife, Dr. Laura Helms Reece, will need to spend a lot of time working in Europe for the foreseeable future. That leaves our family with

two difficult choices. Laura can be in Europe while the rest of us stay here, or we can temporarily relocate our family to Europe to be together.

As you might imagine, Laura and I have spent countless hours thinking on this and praying on this. But as children so often do, our incredible kids, Rose and Gwyn, reminded us of what we already knew -- we actually like being together, and we don't want to live apart.

Since I was elected to the Durham City Council, my life has mostly been about this work, and our family has largely shaped our family life to accommodate my need to do this work. Maybe that's been for the best, maybe it hasn't, I honestly don't know. But I won't be the kind of father who teaches my kids by my example that their father's job must always come first. Now it's time for us to support Laura's career, and the best way to do that -- and to keep our family together -- is for me to leave my job and for us to move to Europe with her.

I love serving on the Durham City Council. Anyone who's ever met me or even heard of me knows how much I love this job. Leaving this job is the hardest decision I'll ever make as a politician, but it is by far the easiest decision I've ever made as a husband and a father.

So that's that. I'm resigning as a member of the Durham City Council effective March 7th, and our family is temporarily relocating to Europe.

To my council colleagues, both past and present, serving with you has been the highest privilege of my public life. Each and every one of you is a truly dedicated public servant, and I'm proud to call each of you my friend. Suffice it to say, I will leave this council in good hands. There's a lot more I could say about each of my council colleagues, but I think I'll save those farewells for our one on one conversations in the days ahead. And I strongly encourage y'all to do the same, we've still got work to do tonight.

Now, this is normally the part in these kinds of remarks where a politician will talk about their accomplishments in office, and so I'm going to do that. The accomplishments I'm most proud of are small in the grand scheme of things, but they don't seem so small to the people involved.

For one thing, I answer a lot of constituent emails. Believe it or not, I'm proud of that.

And by the way, on the email front, let me just say to my colleagues that y'all are going to have to up your game quite a bit once I'm gone. Council Member Williams cannot possibly carry this load all by himself.

I've visited every public park in Durham, I've ridden every GoDurham bus route more than once, I've biked or run every mile of trail in this city, I've picked up roadside trash on far too many Durham streets, I've engaged in a little "light trespassing" on every property that's come before this council for annexation or rezoning over the last several years, and I've hand-delivered countless KN95 masks to folks here in Durham during this awful pandemic. I'm proud of all that.

I've also comforted families suffering from grief and trauma. I've helped arrange counseling and care for kids who've been traumatized by guns and violence. I've sat on porches with families waiting to see if the sheriff would come to evict them from their home. I'm proud of all that.

And despite the fact that my wife will never forgive me for it, I'm proud that on a very hot day in 2017 in downtown Durham, I stepped in front of a massively muscled white supremacist who was wearing a really, really big knife, to prevent him from harming one of my constituents.

But after thinking about it a lot, here's what I'm most proud of — that people across our city, in every part of Durham, from every walk of life, whether they liked me or not, whether they voted for me or not, folks have always felt they could come to me with their problems. I've always made myself available, I've always listened and I've always tried to help. I think folks have appreciated that.

Anyway, the last thing I want to say tonight is this:

Thank you to the people of our beloved city of Durham. In 2015 you took a chance on someone with a huge desire to serve but with very little actual experience in local government. And in 2019 you took another chance on me even after seeing my on the job performance. I will never, ever forget that you placed your trust and confidence in me to do this ridiculous, rewarding, impossible, incomparable job. I have worked as hard as I know how on each of the last 2,267 days to try to earn what you gave me.

But I know that I am burdened with a debt of gratitude and love that I will never truly be able to repay.

That's why after tonight, and after I leave office on March 7th, and as Laura and I undertake the monumental task of moving our family halfway across the world, you won't find me in City Hall very often but you will still find me in our beloved community trying to make a better Durham. In fact, I'll be delivering Meals on Wheels tomorrow morning, I'll be doing creek cleanup with the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association in a few weeks, and I'll be planting trees with Keep Durham Beautiful in the spring. If you're lucky, you'll even see me on the roadside picking up trash. And once the Reece family's time in Europe is over, we'll come home to our beloved Durham, this amazing place where we've been blessed and fortunate to put down roots, where our children were born and where we'll continue to raise them after our European adventure is done.

Because Durham is our home. Even while we're living far away for a little bit, Durham will always be our home.

Durham today. Durham tomorrow. Durham forever.

Thank you Mayor O'Neal, that's all I have tonight.