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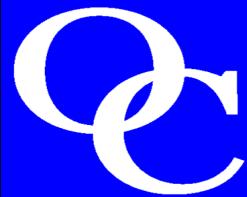


# The Year in Review



## 2015 Fiscal Year Report

July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015



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## Did You Know?

Oconee was ranked the #1 county in Georgia on the “2015 Best Places in the U.S” rankings by Niche.com



Photograph by Greg Newington

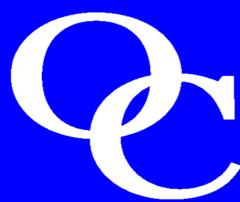


Downtown Watkinsville - Fall 2014

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Oconee County was founded on February 25, 1875. Originally part of Clarke County, Oconee was named for the river which forms its eastern boundary. *Oconee* comes from the Native American word meaning “spring of the hills.” The Oconee County Courthouse (*left*) was constructed in 1939 after the old courthouse burned down in early 1938. It was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1984.

**Bishop ★ Bogart ★ North High Shoals ★ Watkinsville**



# Chairman's Letter

## Board of Commissioners

Dear Fellow Oconee County Citizens,

The Oconee County Board of Commissioners is pleased to provide this report for the fiscal year ending, June 30, 2015, from our Elected Officials and County Departments. Many positive activities occurred within the county over the course of the last fiscal year. We are happy to share these highlights through this *Year In Review*.

Once again, Oconee County has continued with the current unincorporated rate of 6.686 mills. We are hopeful this will benefit our citizens as financial recovery continues from several years ago.

Caterpillar continues to make a major impact in the job market with employee totals at 1,466 in June 2015. Epps Bridge Centre has increased job opportunities for many citizens in Oconee County and the region surrounding Oconee. Likewise, medical office developments and facilities have added opportunity to Oconee's job market.

The Epps Bridge Parkway and 316 Corridor continues to grow and expand Oconee's commercial and retail tax base. During the past few months, Cheddar's Casual Cafe, Best Buy, Party City and Bed, Bath & Beyond became the latest major retail additions to Epps Bridge Centre. Easy access, along with strategic planning for future growth, has made this area appealing to retailers and shoppers. We continue to see medical offices and facilities locate/relocate along the 316 Corridor. Continuing care facilities are planned and being constructed in the area of Virgil Langford Road. Again, easy access and convenience to shopping are luring developments with various medical facilities to the 316 Corridor.

Transportation upgrades have been completed with the repair/resurfacing of 2.4 miles of Atlanta Highway in Oconee County between Barrow and Athens-Clarke Counties. Intersection improvements were completed at Highway 441 North/Highway 186 and 441 Bypass/441 Business Route. Currently, right-turn lane improvements are under construction at Highway 441 South and Hog Mountain Road/Highway 53. The Mars Hill Road Widening Project, Phase I, is well underway. Even though our citizens are experiencing inconvenience along this roadway, traffic will be substantially improved for many years to come.

I trust that this *Year In Review* will provide you with facts and information that help you know more about your Oconee County. Feel Free to visit our website ([www.oconeecounty.com](http://www.oconeecounty.com)) for more information or call me at 706-769-5120.

Thanks for all you do to make Oconee County a great place to live, work and play!



**Melvin Davis, Chairman**  
Oconee County Board of Commissioners



*Jim Luke - Post 1*



*John Daniell - Post 2*



*Barber Wilkes - Post 3*



*Mark Saxon - Post 4*

# Planning for the Future

## FY16 And Beyond...

### Mars Hill Road Widening Project

Phase I construction of Mars Hill Road between Butler's Crossing and the Oconee Connector will finish in FY18. Right-of-way acquisition has begun for Phase II, which will four-lane the road between Butler's Crossing and US 441 South adjacent to the UNG campus. This project is expected to be completed by FY18.



### Parkway Boulevard Project

Plans are underway to open the area behind Kohl's off Epps Bridge Parkway and extend sewer capacity to Jennings Mill Road past the Athens Loop. This extension will be the most significant economic development project in FY16 and beyond as commercial development is planned in this area, potentially adding more retail jobs and infrastructure improvements along Epps Bridge Parkway.

### Did You Know?

*The Hard Labor Creek Reservoir will have a pool area of 1,370 acres once completed.*



*The dam at Hard Labor Creek Reservoir in Rutledge, GA, covers approximately 215 acres after being completed during FY15.*

### Hard Labor Creek Reservoir

The dam at Hard Labor Creek Reservoir was completed in FY15 and is currently in the process of impounding water for supply capacity. The reservoir will provide a sustainable water source for Oconee and Walton counties for the next several decades. With a storage volume of 12 billion gallons, the reservoir will provide an additional 52 million gallons per day of water to Oconee and Walton Counties.

### Wastewater Reclamation Facility Expansion

Long range plans call for the expansion of the current reclamation facility at Calls Creek. Land will eventually be acquired along the Middle Oconee River to allow for effluent to travel from the current facility into the new facility tanks.

### Future Transportation Assessment

During FY16, the county will launch a transportation assessment for the GA-316 Corridor. The study will cover the area between Epps Bridge Parkway at the Kohl's shopping center all the way to the Barrow County line. Studies will also be conducted by county personnel to determine the feasibility of an interchange at the intersection of Oconee Connector and GA-316.



# The Year in Review



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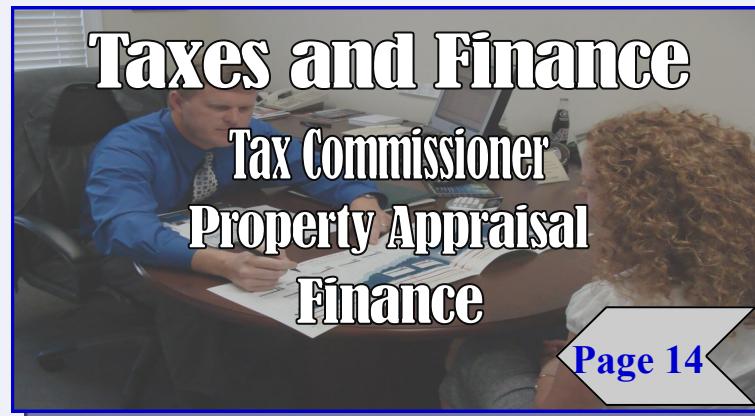
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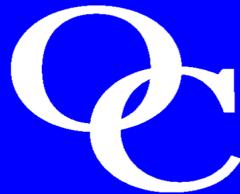
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# Economic Development

Business prospects continue to look bright in Oconee County as 191 new business licenses and over 100 commercial building permits were issued during FY15. Most of this growth was evidenced in the retail trade and healthcare industries, as commercial development along the GA Hwy. 316 - Epps Bridge Parkway corridor ramped up with the addition of 89,000 square feet of commercial/retail space.

Caterpillar continues to be a strong presence in the community as over 1,450 jobs had been created by the end of FY15, exceeding the initial employment projection by 150. Production volumes of the Mini-Hydraulic Excavators and Small Track Type Tractors grew sharply over this period as demand increased in regulated countries. As of June 2015, over \$157 million in public and private funds had been invested in the project.

The Epps Bridge Centre added four new tenants during FY15, creating approximately 330 jobs in the retail trade and food services sector. Additionally, construction began on three buildings next to Marshall's that will eventually house Bed, Bath, & Beyond, Party City, and Ross, all scheduled to open by late Fall 2015.

Resurgence Park, a Class A medical office park located off the Oconee Connector and GA-316, opened its first medical practices in March 2015 and broke ground on a 70-room assisted living facility scheduled to open later this year.

Sales tax distributions increased for the fifth consecutive year, with the three highest months being December 2014, January 2015, and May 2015. Sales tax distributions from SPLOST will be distributed starting in late November of FY16.

## Did You Know?

Oconee had the lowest unemployment rate in Georgia during FY15 at 4.8%.



Cheddar's Casual Café opened in February 2015 and employs approximately 220 people.



The Oconee County Economic Development Department is proud to serve the county's businesses and provides several programs and activities aimed at assisting local businesses and encouraging entrepreneurial investment in the community



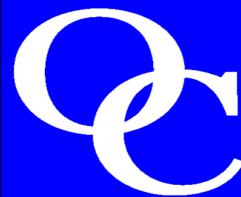
Credit: Blake Giles, *The Oconee Enterprise*

In September 2014, core leaders within the Georgia Department of Economic Development traveled through Oconee County as part of a bus tour which highlighted the community's economic development and tourism assets. Commissioner Chris Carr (standing above) spoke to the Development Authority and noted that the county has a great foundation for economic development.

## Charles Assumes Leadership of Economic Development Initiatives



J.R. Charles was named Economic Development Director on June 2, 2015. Charles replaced Rusty Haygood, who accepted a position with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Before coming to Oconee County, Charles was Economic Development Director for the Habersham County Development Authority. Charles has over 7 years of experience in small business assistance, industrial revenue bond financing, and digital marketing. If you would like to contact Mr. Charles, please email [jrcharles@oconee.ga.us](mailto:jrcharles@oconee.ga.us) or call 706-769-5120.



# Tourism

This past year was another record-breaking year for tourism in Oconee County. A number of small groups were hosted on tours of the county and main attractions within the community. These groups ranged from local scout troops to industry leaders in the State of Georgia. We also developed and hosted a series of Homeschool Day Activities which were well attended.

On a regional level, our department assisted with the roll out of Georgia's Antebellum Bike Trail and the Brews & Q's Trail. We continue to actively participate and co-op with regional and state associations. These affiliations help to promote Oconee County not only throughout the region but the entire state of Georgia as well.

Visitor activity picked up during FY15 with over 4,400 people stopping by the Welcome Center and the Eagle Tavern. While most of our visitors call Georgia home, some came from thousands of miles away to see what Oconee County has to offer. The countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Belgium, Ireland, Singapore, and Thailand were represented by visitors who stopped by the Welcome Center.

Our department began advertising in publications in the Milledgeville/Greensboro area as well as Atlanta, having participated in a radio promotion giveaway on an Atlanta station this past Summer. With the help of our interns, we added new content to website and social media platforms, which resulted in increased web traffic across all platforms.

Notable accomplishments during FY15 included Tourism Director Peggy Holcomb receiving her Leadership Excellence Certification from the Leadership Institute at Columbus State University. Additionally, Assistant Tourism Director Alex Perschka completed his 2nd year of Marketing College through the Southeast Tourism Society and completed the Oconee Chamber of Commerce's "Leadership Oconee" class.



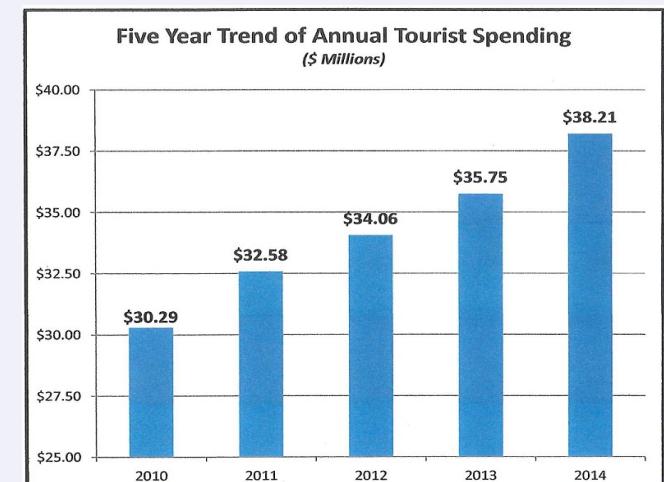
The Oconee Co. Welcome Center is located in downtown Watkinsville on 21 N. Main Street next to the Courthouse

The Tourism Department welcomed 4,442 Visitors to the Welcome Center & Eagle Tavern in FY15, including visitors from 17 different countries worldwide.

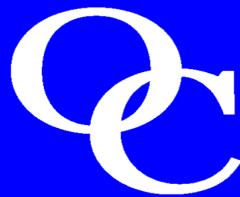
**Visit Oconee**  
Oconee County Tourism Department



One of six advertisements promoting Oconee County tourism that appeared in the *Atlanta Magazine* during FY15.



Oconee County generated \$38.21 million in direct tourist spending in 2014, according to data from the Georgia Dept. of Economic Development. Tourist activity also created over \$1 million in local county tax revenues.



# Oconee Fire Rescue

The Oconee County Fire Rescue Department is responsible for planning, coordinating and implementing fire prevention and suppression activities of seven volunteer fire stations in Oconee County. The seven fire stations are staffed with 178 volunteer Firefighters and Medical Responders with an average response time of 7.2 minutes.

Oconee Fire Rescue is also responsible for: responding to all structure fires in Oconee County and other applicable calls; keeping updated records for ISO (Insurance Services Organization) and working to achieve the best ISO rating; coordinating joint training for all stations; providing fire safety classes for schools and daycare centers; working with local and state agencies on arson investigations; recruiting new volunteer firefighters and medical responders and coordinating volunteer firefighter and medical training.

Notable achievements during FY15 included:

- Graduated 11 Members - Support Firefighter Drivers
- Graduated 6 Members - Nationally Certified Firefighter I - 208 Hours of Training
- Graduated 11 Members - Nationally Certified Firefighter II - 64 Hours of Training
- Finished #1 in State Fundraising among Volunteer Departments for Georgia Firefighters Burn Foundation; Won the "Bring it On" Challenge against City of Atlanta Fire Department on most funds raised for GFBF
- #2 in State Firefighter Competition in Macon, Georgia
- Maintained ISO Class 5/5X Insurance Rating
- Renovated Interior of Station 7 located at 1931 McNutt Creek Road in Bogart

## Did You Know?

OCFR raised over \$25,000 at the Burn Foundation Boot Drive, nearly six times more than it raised in 2000.

## Fire Rescue Responses (July 2014 - June 2015)

- Structure Fires - 37
- Vehicle Fires - 24
- Wildland Fires/Control Burns - 61
- Alarm Activations - 149
- Smoke Scares - 34
- Haz Mat & Power Line Calls - 69
- Automobile Accidents - 191
- Non-Emergency Calls - 49
- Fire Calls Cancelled Enroute - 104

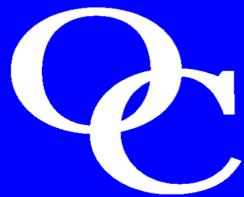
**Total Fire Calls - 718**



OCFR Fire Safety Presentation for grades K-3



2014 Oconee Fire Rescue Competition Team  
2nd Place Finish at State Competition in Macon, GA



# Emergency Management

Oconee County Emergency Management keeps a watchful eye on all severe weather that threatens our county. Our mission is to assist schools, law enforcement and other agencies in preparing for and responding to the damages of severe weather, as well as protect people and property in the event of a disaster or crisis situation. While it was a relatively calm year in terms of the weather, Emergency Management personnel conducted training exercises on winter weather and search and rescue involving county, state and federal agencies. These exercises help train first responders on the necessary steps to take during advanced warning of emergencies and disasters affecting the county. Additionally, they help ensure the Emergency Operations Center is in a state of readiness in the event of a serious weather situation.

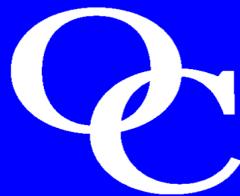
Emergency Management Services are given a similar charge to protect county citizens, especially when dealing with automobile accidents and other emergency medical responses. Oconee County EMS provides emergency medical responder services to the citizens of Oconee County with 7 rescue trucks and 1 mass casualty truck. Personnel consists of 98 volunteer medically trained fire rescue personnel, including 55 medical responders, 41 EMTs and 2 paramedics. Trained medical responders receive a high level of basic training, with over 100 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual re-certification. During FY15, Oconee County EMS partnered with National EMS to provide medical care to county citizens experiencing medical emergencies.

## Total Emergency Medical Responses

- Sick Person - 1,474
- Motor Vehicle Crash - 310
- Trauma (Other than MVC) - 292
- Other (Lift, Alarm, Etc.) - 233

**Total FY15 Responses - 2,309**





# Animal Control & Shelter

The mission of Oconee County Animal Control is to protect animals and serve citizens through the fair and impartial enforcement of state and county regulations pertaining to animal welfare and ownership; to provide a safe, compassionate shelter for lost, stray, and unwanted animals; to rehome adoptable animals through a vigorous adoption and foster program; to educate the public about the importance of pet sterilization, humane care, and responsible pet ownership; to work closely with other county departments, agencies, and volunteers to benefit and improve animal welfare in the county and when unavoidable, to provide humane euthanasia.

In March 2014, the new **Foster Home** program was initiated to aid in saving more lives. This program, consisting only of volunteers, continued to host volunteer recruitment drives and appreciation events during FY15. The commitment, dedication, and selflessness of these volunteers helped to raise animal awareness and save animal lives.

Throughout FY15, several events were held at PetSmart during “National Adoption Weekend” and at the Bogart, Statham, and Watkinsville Fall Festivals. These events let staff find foster homes for animals, seek new volunteers, and encourage adoptions.

The Shelter’s weekly newsletter, **Whiskered Secrets**, and the **Friends of Oconee County Animal Shelter** Facebook page are great sources of information for finding animals to rescue as well as view upcoming events. To find out how you can help or attend an event, please contact the Oconee County Animal Shelter at (706) 769-3956.

## Did You Know?

*Only 13 animals of all those impounded at the Shelter tested positive for rabies.*



The Oconee County Animal Control Dept. had a successful year in that no adoptable animals were euthanized under staff care. Other notable accomplishments during FY15 included :

- 502 animals were adopted
- Officers drove over 61,000 miles while serving as first responders to various calls



## Meet the Staff

**Catlyn Vickers - Director**

**Nancy Bennett - Assistant Director**

**Crystal Berisko - Adoption/Rescue Coordinator**

**Nick Hensley - Road Officer**

**Cher Williams - Road Officer**

**Sherry Aycock - Road Officer**

Emergency Calls are answered 7 days a week. The shelter is open to the public:

**Monday - Tuesday: 12p-5p**

**Wednesday - By Appointment Only**

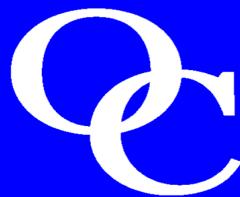
**Thursday - Friday: 12p-5p**

**Saturday: 11a-1p**

In order to efficiently serve the public, all paperwork should be turned in by:

**4:30 p.m. (Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri)**

**12:30 p.m. (Saturday)**



# Parks and Recreation

The Oconee County Parks and Recreation Department (OCPRD) completed a record setting year in programming, community events, and tournaments hosted for FY15. By encouraging our citizens to get out and get active with our “Live Active” slogan, OCPRD was able to serve the diverse recreational needs of our growing population through a number of programs and events designed to promote physical activity.

During FY15, over 14,000 people participated in community programs and special events sponsored by OCPRD, including over 5,500 participants in recreational programs and several thousand participating in tournament play. Oconee Veterans Park experienced a high volume of visitors as well, with over 40,000 annual day trips made to the Fitness Center and Open Gym.

For a community of 34,000, our parks are well utilized! Parks and Recreation outlets provide endless benefits that are directly connected to our community’s quality of life. The activity level of our citizens support why Oconee County is ranked as one of the healthiest communities in the state.

OCPRD manages a total of 630 park acres. Park Services staff manages all maintenance on athletic fields (18 athletic fields, 14 tennis courts, 1 outdoor basketball court, 1 outdoor volleyball court, 1 disc golf course, 4 playgrounds, and paved walking paths) and building facilities (2 gymnasiums, 4 restroom/concession buildings, indoor walking track, fitness center, 5 meeting rooms, offices and a maintenance shop).

Of note during FY15, OCPRD competed for the Pet Safe “Bark for Your Park” grant funds and was awarded \$25,000 for park improvements to the dog park at Oconee Veterans Park. Watkinsville was one of four communities around the country to be awarded the \$25,000 prize.



The Oconee County Parks and Recreation Department seeks to enrich the quality of life for citizens by providing safe and accessible recreational facilities and a diversified program of recreational activities

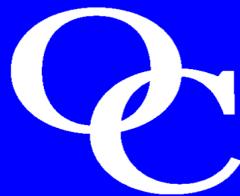
## LIVE ACTIVE



The Oconee County Parks and Recreation Department was named the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association District 7 Agency of the Year in October 2014. Staff was recognized at the District 7 Banquet held in Norcross, Georgia.

OCPRD was allotted \$236,000 in SPLOST funds for FY15. Projects that were completed during this time included:

- 1 mile paved trail at Oconee Veterans Park
- PA Systems installed at all parks facilities
- HVAC and tennis lights at Herman C. Michael Park



# Oconee County Library

The Oconee County Library is a member of Athens Regional Library System, which is composed by the counties of Athens, Franklin, Madison, Oconee, and Oglethorpe. With slightly more than 16,000 cardholders, the Oconee County Library provides reading and study materials, access to over 80 computers, and learning opportunities for Oconee County residents of all ages.

The Oconee County Library provides many online resources that are available 24/7 to residents. A number of free electronic books, audio books, and magazines are available within the growing digital circulation section. In addition, the Oconee County Library System has four meeting spaces for community groups and special events. With over 920 programs throughout FY15, these meeting spaces served an important function to the community and helped support children's programs and other activities.

PINES, a consortium of Georgia Libraries, gives Oconee County residents free access to materials in over 275 libraries across the state. As part of this organization, the Oconee County Library strives to develop innovative programming for people of all ages in order to meet the literacy needs of residents throughout the Oconee County region.

For more information on Oconee County Libraries and a summary of programs and events, please visit [athenslibrary.org/oconee](http://athenslibrary.org/oconee).

## Did You Know?

*The number of book checkouts increased by 2.9% from the previous fiscal year.*



The Oconee County Library is located at 1080 Experiment Station Road in Watkinsville.

The mission of Oconee County Libraries is to offer effective and professional service by providing library materials, resources, information, and life-long learning opportunities for the people of Oconee County.



The Oconee County Library is a strong supporter of summer reading for students of all grade levels. Over 1,970 students participated in the library's "Summer Reading 2015" program.

**During FY15, the Oconee County Library had:**  
**924 Programs**  
**31,851 Attendees**  
**273,721 Items Circulated**  
**230,011 Visitors**





# Civic Center

For the fourth consecutive year, the Civic Center hosted over 400 events. Once again, Broadway-caliber musicals were produced by the Oconee Youth Playhouse and Cornerstone Productions. The University of Georgia sponsored a Worldwide Poultry Ventilation Conference that brought in visitors from as far away as China and Australia. Congressman Paul Broun's Office conducted a Small Business and Grants Workshop and the Civic Center continued its support of the Oconee County School System by hosting 187 School programs, which included standardized testing and seventeen performing arts events.

Oconee County sponsored many public service events such as the Serve Safe Food Safety Program and Department of Natural Resources Hunter and Boat Safety Courses. The variety of private groups sponsoring events included: ten different performing arts organizations, six different religious organizations, sixteen clubs, and over twenty-six individuals. The Civic Center Banquet Room is also used as a polling site and is one of two County locations for early voting.

Civic Center Technical Services provided support for various events throughout the County. New technical innovations were used in the Theatre that allowed the use of automated moving lights and the first "flying" of actors on (above) the stage.

The Civic Center also underwent several upgrades which improved the aesthetics of the building. New carpeting was installed and painting occurred throughout the building.

	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	Total
<b>School System Events</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>1,135</b>
<b>County Sponsored Events</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>441</b>
<b>Private Events</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>813</b>
<b>Total Events</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>2,389</b>

The mission of the Oconee County Civic Center is to provide high quality meeting and performance space for a variety of public, private and school system related functions. The Civic Center seeks to provide full service meeting, conference, recreational and cultural arts facilities.



Oconee Youth Playhouse's production of *Beauty and the Beast* in January 2015



The Cotton Patch Quilters' Show

# Tax Commissioner

The duties and responsibilities of the Tax Commissioner's office are many and varied, but our main goal is to provide friendly, quality service to the citizens of Oconee County.

Motor vehicle titling and registration is a significant part of the day to day operations of our office. There are 30,024 vehicles registered in Oconee County, of which the Tax Commissioner's Office processed 6,054 title type transactions in FY15.

In addition to the collection and distribution of motor vehicle title and ad valorem tax, mobile home tax and real and personal property tax for the State of Georgia, the County Board of Commissioners, and the local Board of Education, our office collects and distributes property tax for each of the county's four municipalities.

Our website is now mobile friendly and property tax can be viewed and paid through an online portal. Motor vehicle registrations can also be renewed online through this streamlined process. A wealth of additional information is available on our website and on the [Georgia Department of Revenue](#) website.

In FY15, Tax Commissioner Jennifer Riddle was appointed as leader of District 4 of the Georgia Association of Tax Officials (GATO). District 4 is comprised of the counties of Barrow, Athens-Clarke, Jackson, Oconee, Rockdale, and Walton.

## Did You Know?

*The Tax Commissioner Office also offers an electronic check payment option for vehicle registration renewals.*



Tracye Bailey was sworn in as Deputy Tax Commissioner by Judge David Anglin on July 1, 2015.

There are 17,997 real property parcels and 3,586 personal property accounts in Oconee County. As of June 30, 2015, we have a 98% collection rate for 2014 property tax.

## Meet the Staff



**Tax Commissioner's Office (L-R)**

**Motor Vehicle Registrar - Marsha Jordan**

**Deputy Tax Commissioner - Tracye Bailey**

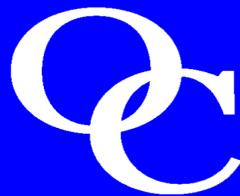
**Motor Vehicle Registrar Sr. - Patti Childers**

**Motor Vehicle Registrar - Helen Hudson**

**Motor Vehicle Registrar - Debra Watson-Hunter**

**Tax Commissioner - Jennifer Riddle**

**Administrative Assistant - Lisa Jackson**



# Property Appraisal

The mission of the Property Appraisal Department is to establish fair market values for all real and personal property in the county. These fair market values are to be compiled into a tax digest for use in calculation of millage rates for the Oconee County Board of Commissioners, Board of Education and all city governments. These millage rates are then used by the Tax Commissioner for determining the tax bills each year.

Below are the historical trends over the past 10 years for sales on new existing homes in Oconee County:

Historical Trends for Improved Residential Sales			Weighted Averages			
New Construction		Existing Construction		New & Existing		
Year	# of	Average \$/	# of Sales	Average \$/	# of	Average \$/
2005	263	\$315,062	427	\$255,861	690	\$278,426
2006	243	\$355,517	458	\$266,158	701	\$297,134
2007	199	\$382,152	350	\$255,770	549	\$301,581
2008	137	\$370,452	207	\$269,004	344	\$309,406
2009	36	\$361,717	239	\$265,079	275	\$277,729
2010	31	\$329,122	207	\$258,356	238	\$267,574
2011	57	\$300,998	179	\$275,279	236	\$281,491
<b>2012</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>\$281,176</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>\$239,913</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>\$248,949</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>\$304,475</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>\$265,428</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>\$280,804</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>\$328,231</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>\$273,291</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>\$290,680</b>

\*These values were compiled from **Fair Market Value sales only**. **2014 sales are through 12/31/2014**. New sales include 2013 and 2014 year built. Custom built homes not sold on the open market are **not** included.

## Meet the Staff



Allen Skinner  
Chief Appraiser



Trent Crawford  
Asst. Chief Appraiser



Diane Lilienthal  
Admin. Secretary



Chris Neal  
Tax Appraiser I



Carol Gurley  
Tax Appraiser II



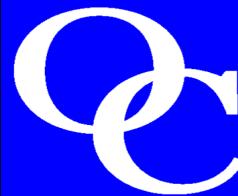
Nathan Evans  
Tax Appraiser II



Brian Bray  
Tax Appraiser III



Amanda Shelton  
Property Appraiser



# Finance

**Financial Highlights:** Oconee County's total budget for FY16 is \$39,676,864 which includes a General Fund budget of \$23,740,059. This budget maintains a millage rate of 6.686 for the 9th consecutive year. Emphasis remains on three core areas: Public Safety, Public Works, and Parks & Recreation.

**Primary Department Responsibilities:** Financial Services, Bond Ratings, Financial Accounting, Cash Receipts, Accounts Payable, Audits, Budgeting, Internal Controls, Procurement and Property Management.

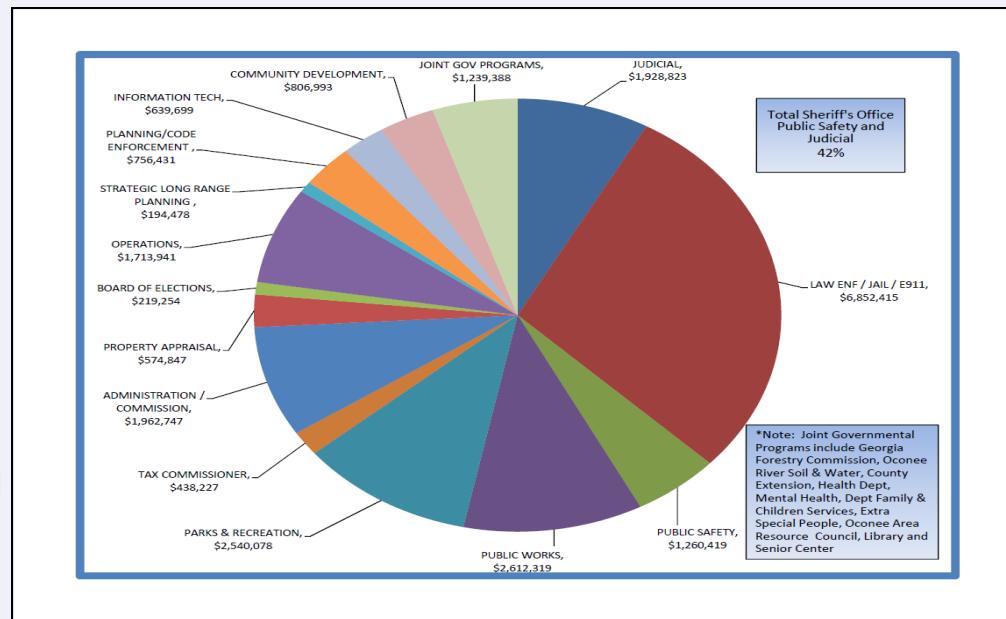
**Bond Rating:** Moody's bond rating for Oconee County is Aa2. An Aa2 bond rating has an investment grade of high-quality and very low credit risk.

**Planning for the Future:** A tax digest trending upward by about 7% per year; new home starts on the rise, as well as retail growth at the Epps Bridge Center. There is natural existing growth in the economy and inflationary growth as evidenced by an expanding tax base. Oconee County continues collaboration between the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education as well as working with the local Chamber of Commerce to promote "Shop Locally" initiative.

## Did You Know?

*Sales tax receipts from FY15 in Oconee totaled \$5.64 million, nearly a 8.6% increase from FY14.*

## Expenditures



The mission of the Finance Department is to provide the highest quality services in a fiscally responsible manner to promote the health, safety and general welfare of all Oconee County citizens.

## SPLOST Hard at Work!

Oconee County began collecting SPLOST funds in October 2015 and distributed within the county in November 2015. Finance staff worked with county personnel in FY15 to identify project needs for FY16. Some of these planned projects/allocations include:

- Infrastructure on roads and water - Mars Hill Road Widening Project
- Expansions at Civic Center and Animal Control Shelter
- 8 new patrol cars for Law Enforcement
- Debt service payment for Parks & Rec.



Installation of water main on Mars Hill Road



# Public Works

Public Works is responsible for Road Maintenance and Construction, Engineering and Design, Plan Review and Project Inspection, Solid Waste Collection, and Recycling.

Additional duties of Public Works staff include: reviewing site plans, preliminary plats, and final plats; inspecting installed infrastructure for conformance to applicable codes for public right of ways; and providing support necessary for the safe and continual operation of all traffic devices on County roads.

Road Department staff responsibilities include: repair and maintenance of paved and dirt roads, shoulders, ditches, and signs; mowing; debris removal; and dead animal removal. During FY15, over 1,053 citizen requested work orders that were completed by the Road Department.

## FY15 Activity Summary

Right-of-way acquisition activities are complete and road construction began on the Mars Hill Road Widening Project Phase 1, which covers the area between GA Hwy. 316 and Butler's Crossing. Right-of-Way acquisition activities began for Phase 2 of the project in the area between Butler's Crossing and the US 441 interchange.

Nine miles of road were repaired and resurfaced using funds provided by SPLOST and the Georgia Department of Transportation's Local Maintenance Improvement Grant. Additionally, crack sealing was applied to extend the functional life of 13.5 miles of road, and pavement markings were applied to enhance driver safety on 32 miles of road. Concrete drainage structures were repaired or replaced at various locations throughout the county in order to alleviate any water drainage issues.

## FY15 Statistics

- 53,000 customers visited our 5 collection sites (including the landfill)
- 24,000 collection site customers disposed of "Pay As You Throw" (PAYT) bags
- 44,000 collection site customers disposed of recycling

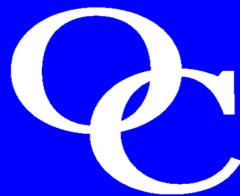
The mission of the Public Works Department is to provide overall coordination and direction to five separate but cooperating divisions (Engineering, Roads & Bridges, Sanitation, Storm Water, and Clean & Beautiful), and to interact appropriately with various state, federal, and local agencies.



Construction on Mars Hill Road Widening Project



New pavement along Whitlow Creek Drive



# Utilities

For the 13th consecutive year, Oconee County received a Platinum Award from the Georgia Association of Water Professionals for “Drinking Water Systems in the State of Georgia.” As a “Water First Community” designated by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the Oconee County Utility Department (OCUD) is proud to provide the highest quality of water to the citizens of Oconee County

The Oconee County Utility Dept. is currently staffed with 23 employees, including the following professionals:

- 11 employees with State of Georgia Professional Water and Wastewater Licenses; six Water Distribution Operators; six Collection System Operators; two Class I Wastewater Operators; two Water Laboratory Analysts; and two Wastewater Laboratory Analysts.

These Operators provide maintenance of county treatment plants, water sources, distribution/collection facilities and equipment, testing, preparation and submission of required reports to Georgia Environmental Agency and, most importantly, the Annual Consumer Confidence Report provided to all county water customers. OCUD staff and administration continually analyze the county's water and wastewater needs and provide improvements to meet those needs.

The most significant highlight of FY15 was the completion of the Whippoorwill Road Waterline Extension between Elder Road and Union Church Road. Additional projects are scheduled to begin in FY16, including the McNutt Creek Trunk Sewer and the Calls Creek Water Reclamation Facility upgrade. These two major wastewater projects will shape the county's development future and improve the quality of service.

## Did You Know?

*The dam at Hard Labor Creek Reservoir, the county's future water source, will be full by late 2017.*

<b>OCUD Statistics</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Water Customers</b>	<b>8,690</b>	<b>8,803</b>	<b>9,093</b>	<b>9,600</b>	<b>9,900</b>
<b>Sewer Customers</b>	<b>1,455</b>	<b>1,534</b>	<b>1,638</b>	<b>1,960</b>	<b>2,090</b>
<b>Total Water Mains (miles)</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>290</b>
<b>Total Sewer Mains (miles)</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Avg. Retail Water Base Charge</b>	<b>\$18.00</b>	<b>\$19.00</b>	<b>\$19.00</b>	<b>\$19.00</b>	<b>\$19.50</b>

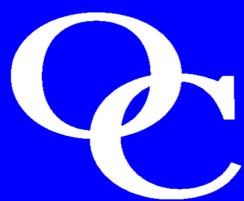
**The mission of the Utility Department is to provide excellent drinking water at a competitive rate and improve protection of our waterways by increasing quality assurance in the operation and maintenance of our wastewater treatment plants and pumping stations.**



McNutt Creek Trunk Sewer - Soil Erosion Prevention



Hard Labor Creek Reservoir Dam - Finished in FY15



# Planning & Code Enforcement

The Planning and Code Enforcement Department promotes public safety and protects property rights through site design, construction, occupancy, use, and location of facilities within the unincorporated Oconee County. This task is accomplished through comprehensive planning, building and development codes, environmental protection ordinances and policies adopted by the Board of Commissioners and state and federal governments and agencies.

Staff provides planning, permitting, inspections and code enforcement services, in accordance with the Service Delivery Strategy and intergovernmental agreements, for the municipalities of Bishop, Bogart, North High Shoals, and Watkinsville.

FY13's restructure of combining the Code Enforcement and Planning Departments into one department has proved itself by integrating flexibility and efficiency into the new department's overall strategic plan. The building community is now able to ask for a specific staff member when questions arise on the various types of building inspections and permitting. Due to increased cross-training at different levels, many staff members can answer questions regarding various permitting subject matter.

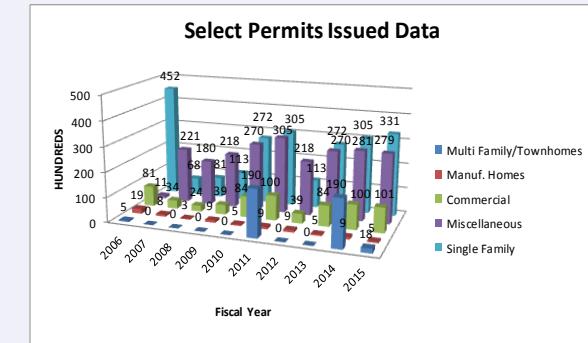
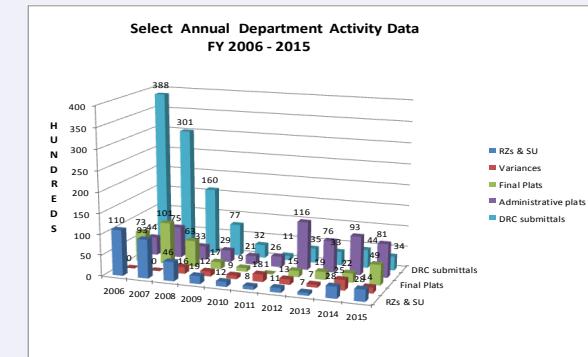
During FY15, the department reviewed, issued and/or processed the following:

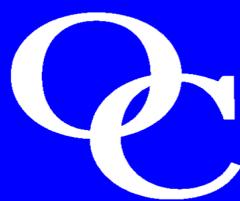
- 331 single family building permits
- 18 multifamily building permits
- 101 commercial building permits
- 279 miscellaneous building permits
- Collected \$434,957.27 in permit fees
- Conducted 2619 residential inspections and 334 commercial inspections
- 14 Rezoning applications, 7 Special Use application and 25 variances
- 44 items were reviewed, approved and/or permitted by the Development Review Committee
- Issued 189 new and 1,112 renewal Occupational Tax Certificates with a value of \$116,755.68

**The mission of the Code Enforcement Division is to preserve and promote public safety and welfare, protect property and assist the public of facilities within Oconee County.**

**The mission of the Planning Division is to assist the Board of Commissioners in planning orderly growth and development within Oconee County**

## Historical Data





# Cooperative Extension

UGA Extension extends lifelong learning to the people of Georgia through unbiased, research-based education in agriculture, the environment, communities, youth and families. The Extension Agent completed another successful year during FY15, highlighted by the 4-H and Youth Development Agency maintaining the **best youth development program in the state**.

The Agricultural and Natural Resources Agent identified key issues to educate the community about the importance of small farm productivity, profitability, sustainability and agricultural awareness in order to balance the growth of Oconee. In Oconee County, agriculture is alive and well as evidenced by a Farm Gate Value of **\$81 million**. As a result of needs-based assessments, several educational programs were provided to farmers and agricultural enthusiasts during FY15. Among the Extension-sponsored programs were 3rd Grade Ag Day, Fall Festival, Farm City Tour, Livestock Shows and Trainings, Small Tractor & Equipment Training, Beef Cattle Production, and Marketing and Selling through Social Media.

The Family and Consumer Science Agent provided nine nutrition and wellness programs during FY15, including Senior Sense, Wellness Works, Market to Table, Family Meal Time, and Kids in the Kitchen helping **221 participants** make healthier food choices, increase family meal time, move more safely, and improve food preparation. The Family and Consumer Sciences Program provided two ServSafe programs, teaching 18 participants safe food practices for the food service industry. These programs help ensure reduced incidences of foodborne illness in the food service/ long term care/child care facilities, and an improved quality of life.

Notable achievements by the 4-H and Youth Development Agency included:

- 4-H volunteers donated **979** hours of service to a variety of Oconee 4-H activities and events
- More than **700** youth were impacted by the Oconee County 4-H Program
- **199** youth attended the 4-H Summer Camp at Rock Eagle in Eatonton, Georgia
- **Four** 4-H'ers served on the Northeast District Board of Directors
- **Seven** Senior 4-H members competed at State Congress in Atlanta
- **Twenty-two** youth graduated from the Georgia Civic Awareness Program
- **\$7,000** was awarded in college scholarships

## Did You Know?

*Over 345 hours of community service was carried out in the community by 4-H members.*



The mission of the Oconee County Extension Agent is to provide quality educational programming, expertise and leadership to citizens of Oconee in the areas of Agricultural and Natural Resources, 4-H & Youth Development and Family & Consumer Sciences.

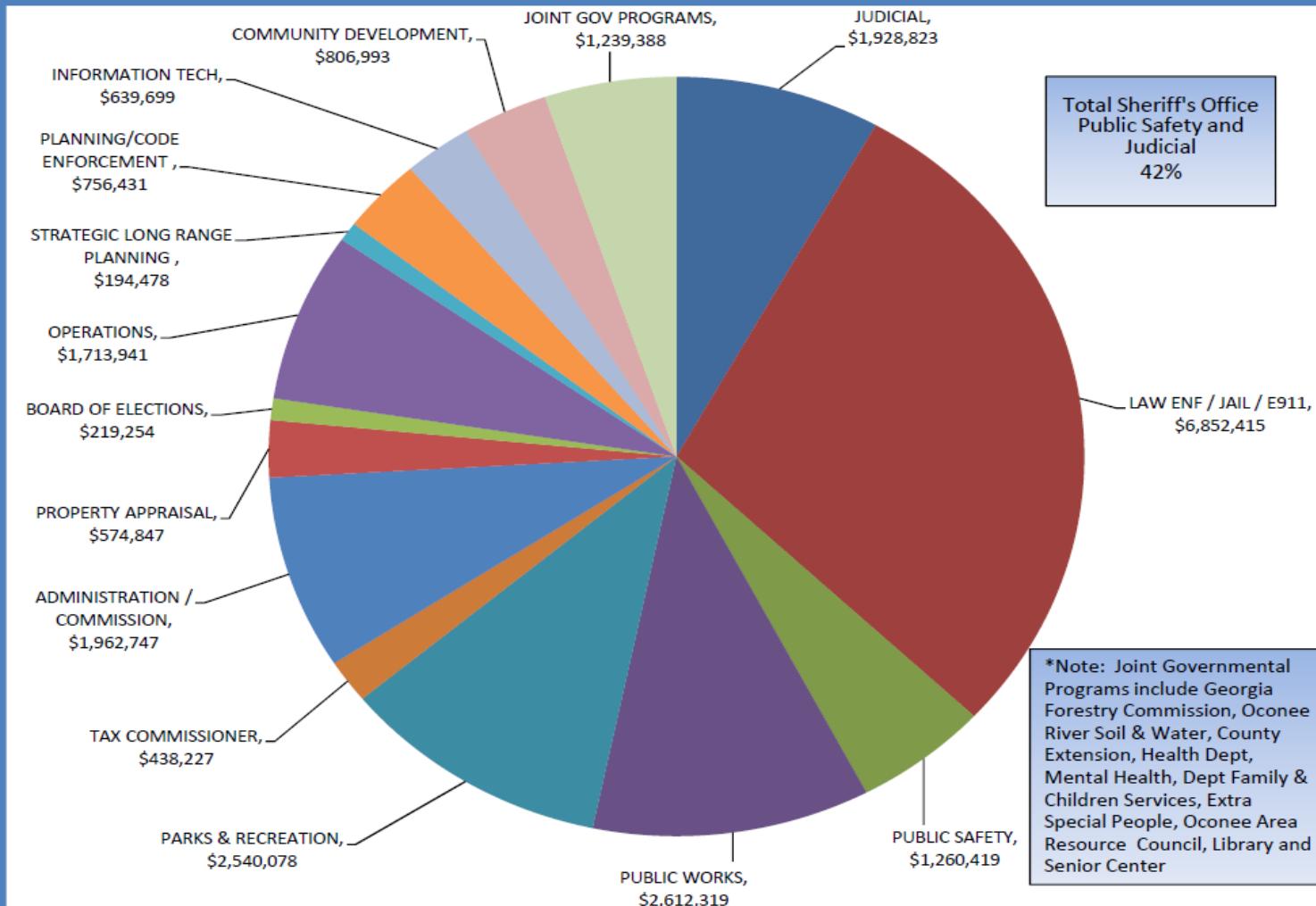


Oconee County Farm City Agriculture Tour

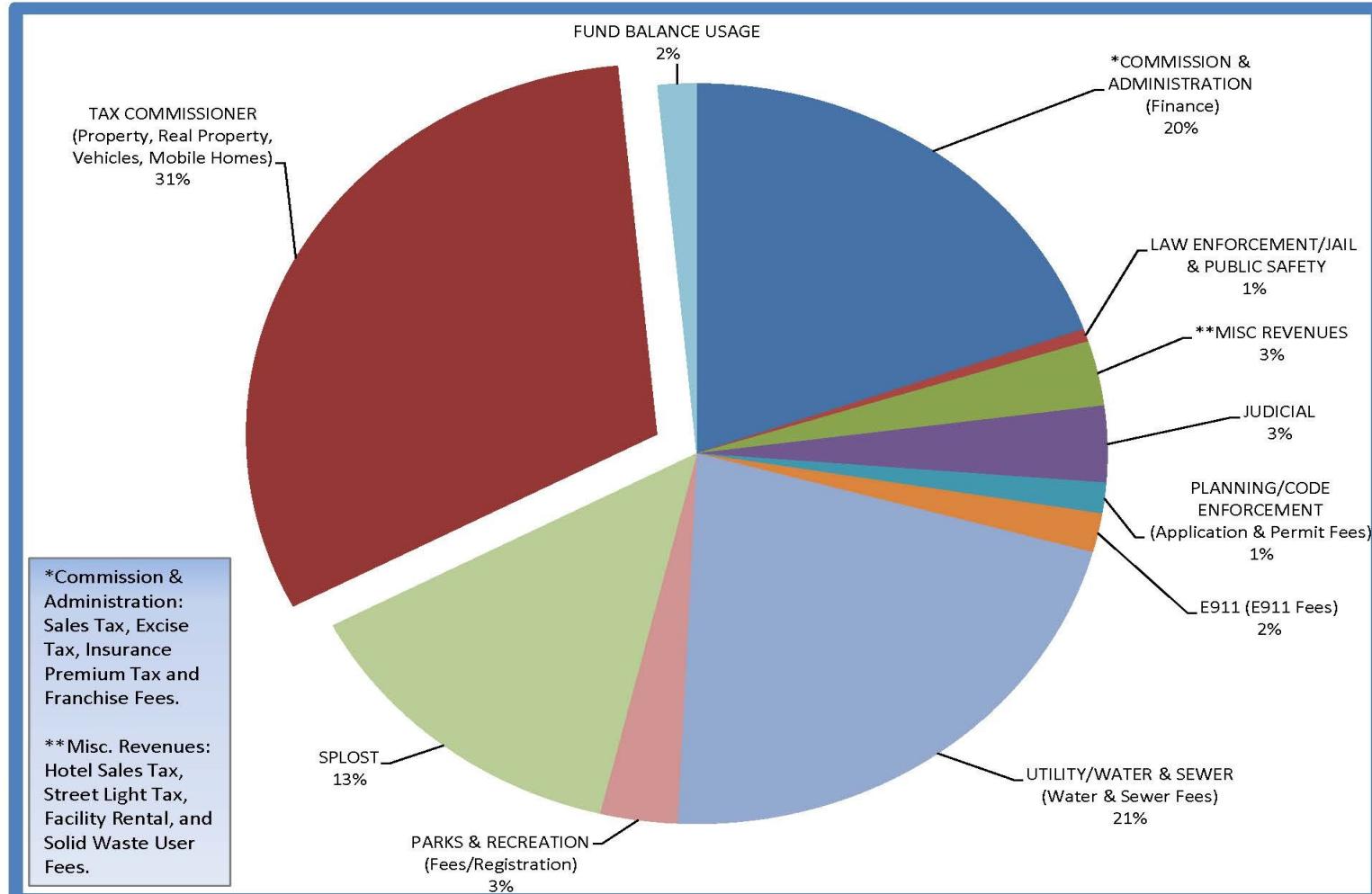


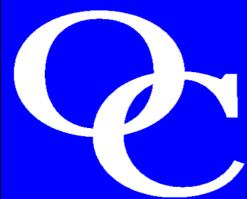
Oconee County 4-H Corn Club

# Expenditures



# Revenue chart





# Your \$2,000 Tax Bill...



71.62% BOARD OF EDUCATION

**(\$1,432) – 17.00**

28.17% BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **(\$564) – 6.686 mills (Unincorp)**

0.21% STATE OF GEORGIA

**(\$4) – .05**

In FY16 For Every \$100 in Property Taxes, You Will Pay.....



School Maintenance &  
Operations - \$71.62

Public Safety - \$9.63

Public Works - \$3.10

Parks & Rec - \$3.01

Administration - \$3.09

Judicial - \$2.29

Operations - \$2.03

Planning, SLRP, & Code  
Enforcement - \$1.13

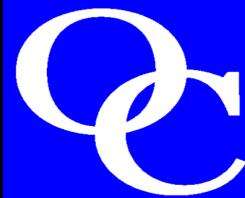
Joint Programs - \$1.47

Tax Collections - \$1.20

Community Dev. - \$0.96

Board of Elections - \$0.26

State of GA - \$0.21



# Elected Officials



**Front Row (L-R):** Probate Judge David Anglin; Superior Court Judge Patrick Haggard; Chief Superior Court Judge David Sweat; Superior Court Judge Lawton Stephens; Chief Magistrate Judge Eric Norris

**Back Row (L-R):** Post 4 Commissioner Mark Saxon; Coroner Ed Carson; Clerk of Courts Angie Elder-Johnson; Tax Commissioner Jennifer Riddle; Chairman Melvin Davis; Post 1 Commissioner Jim Luke; Post 2 Commissioner John Daniell; Post 3 Commissioner W.E. "Bubber" Wilkes

*Not Pictured:* Sheriff Scott Berry, Superior Court Judge Michael Coleman

