

Oconee County, Georgia

Annual Report 2023



Committed to Our Community

Chairman's Letter



John Daniell
Chairman
jdaniell@oconee.ga.us

Oconee County's mission is to provide the highest quality services in a fiscally responsible manner. One of the most important aspects of the job of commissioner is financial stewardship, and, in 2023, we were pleased to announce that Oconee County earned a bond rating upgrade from Aa1 to Aaa from Moody's Investors Service. This bond rating reflects the fiscal stability and positive financial outlook of Oconee County and is a national "seal of approval" for the strong commitment to financial responsibility. It's the highest rating on the Moody's scale, and Oconee County is the second smallest county in the nation to receive it.

Oconee County is also happy to deliver on a promise to bring high-speed internet to underserved areas of the county. This vital improvement was necessary as internet access is now integral to all aspects of residents' lives. Phase 1 of the Charter Spectrum grant program has neared completion, vastly expanding broadband service in the county.

Calls Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility is undergoing an upgrade that will double its treatment capacity to three million gallons per day. In this multi-year project, Phase 1 was completed this past year, with final activation expected at the end of 2025.

Oconee County's park system represents a focal point in quality of life for every age of Oconee resident. We are excited to approve the master plans for our park system, including the final build-out of Oconee Veteran Park's tennis complex, pickleball courts at Herman C. Michael Park, and activating Heritage Park with more equestrian-related amenities. We are especially excited about the design of the upcoming Dawson Park, which will provide much needed additional fields, courts, and passive amenities for the community.

We pride ourselves on customer service and being responsive to community needs. We have recently launched Oconee County GA Access, a SeeClickFix App, that allows users to report issues and request county services directly from their phone or tablet. A web portal is also available for access via computer. The app is free and available for download on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

July of 2023 saw staff move into the newly completed Administrative Building, bringing numerous services together in one physical location. The Oconee County Courthouse now houses various court services. We hope you make it out to a Board of Commissioners Meeting in our new space and become actively engaged in your county government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Daniell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "John" on the top line and "Daniell" on the bottom line.

Board of Commissioners



Mark Thomas
Commissioner, Post 1
mthomas@oconee.ga.us



Amrey Harden
Commissioner, Post 3
aharden@oconee.ga.us



Chuck Horton
Commissioner, Post 2
chorton@oconee.ga.us



Mark Saxon
Commissioner, Post 4
msaxon@oconee.ga.us

Oconee County Government

Established February 25, 1875, Oconee is the 137th county created in the state, and its 186 square miles, located in Georgia's Piedmont region, are home to four municipalities: the City of Watkinsville, the City of Bogart, the Town of Bishop, and the Town of North High Shoals.

The county is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners, as provided by state law, which is vested with budget and taxing authority, authority to adopt county ordinances, and control of county property, roads, and facilities. A Chairman and four Commissioners are elected at-large for staggered terms of four years. The Chairman is a full-time elected official and the county's Chief Executive Officer who, in consultation with the Commissioners, appoints officers and staff as needed to administer the responsibilities of the Board.

The Board of Commissioners meets twice each month. Regular Meetings are held the first Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m., and Agenda Setting Meetings are held the Tuesday prior to each regular meeting at 6 p.m. The Board meets in the Commission Chambers, Room 224, 2nd floor, Oconee County Courthouse, 23 North Main Street, Watkinsville, GA 30677. Since its inception, Oconee County has been fueled by a strong community, rich agricultural lands, and an educated approach to economic development, which have helped make Oconee an outstanding place to call home!



Oconee County Government

Mission

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

Vision

An engaged community with world-class schools, thriving commercial sectors, vibrant town centers, high-quality residential housing and diverse amenities, and the preservation of our rural quality of life.



Strategic Goals

- Smart Government
- Smart Growth
- Smart Infrastructure
- Excellent Quality of Life

Address
7635 Macon Highway
Watkinsville, GA 30677

Telephone
706-769-5120
Website
www.oconeecounty.com

County Budget Expenditures

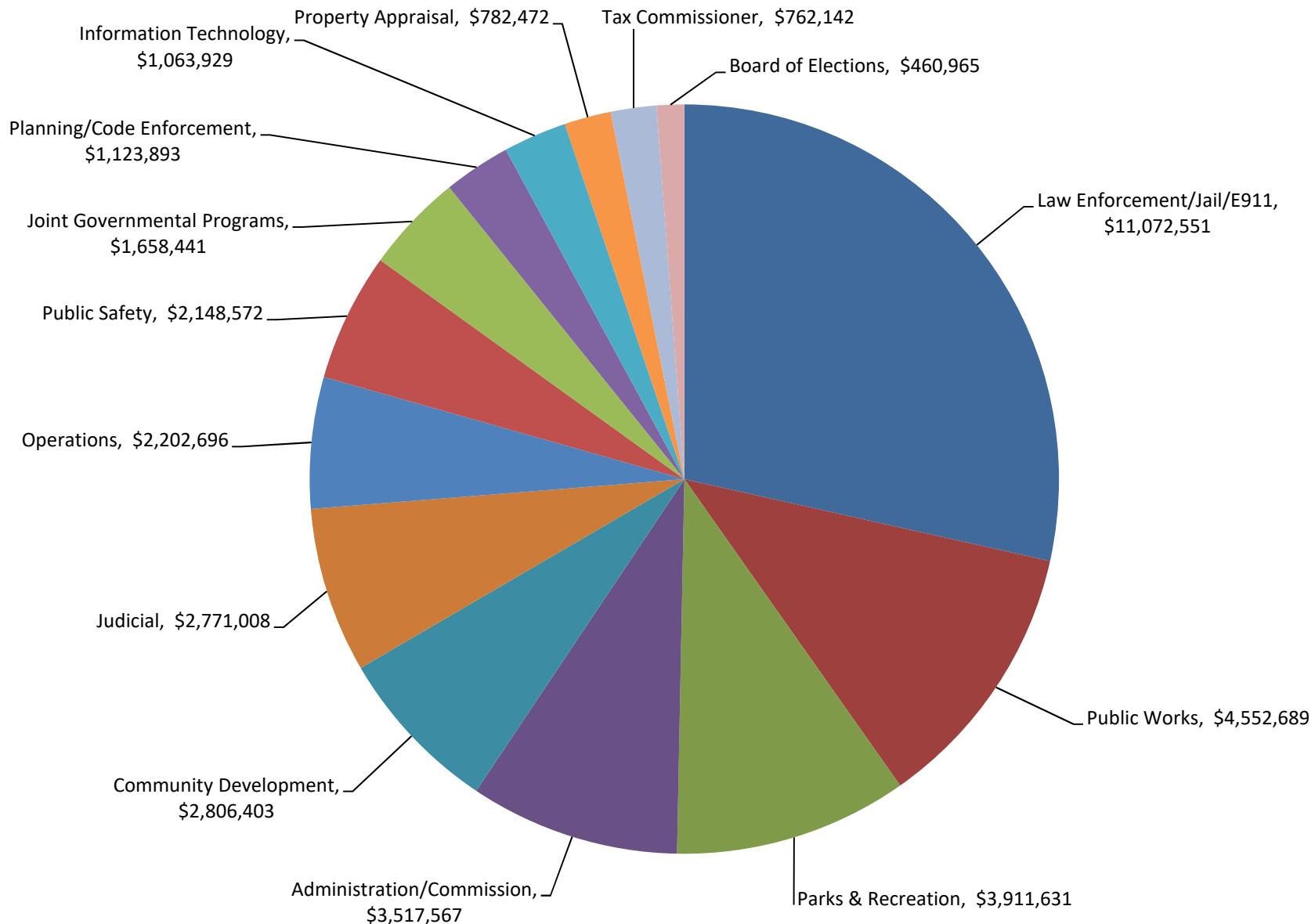
FY24 Budget General Fund Expenditures

Function	Amount
Law Enforcement/Jail/E911	\$ 11,072,551
Public Works	\$ 4,552,689
Parks & Recreation	\$ 3,911,631
Administration/Commission	\$ 3,517,567
Community Development	\$ 2,806,403
Judicial	\$ 2,771,008
Operations	\$ 2,202,696
Public Safety	\$ 2,148,572
Joint Governmental Programs	\$ 1,658,441
Planning/Code Enforcement	\$ 1,123,893
Information Technology	\$ 1,063,929
Property Appraisal	\$ 782,472
Tax Commissioner	\$ 762,142
Board of Elections	\$ 460,965
Total	\$ 38,834,959

*Budget as originally adopted July 1, 2023

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

FY24 Budget - General Fund Expenditures



County Budget Revenues

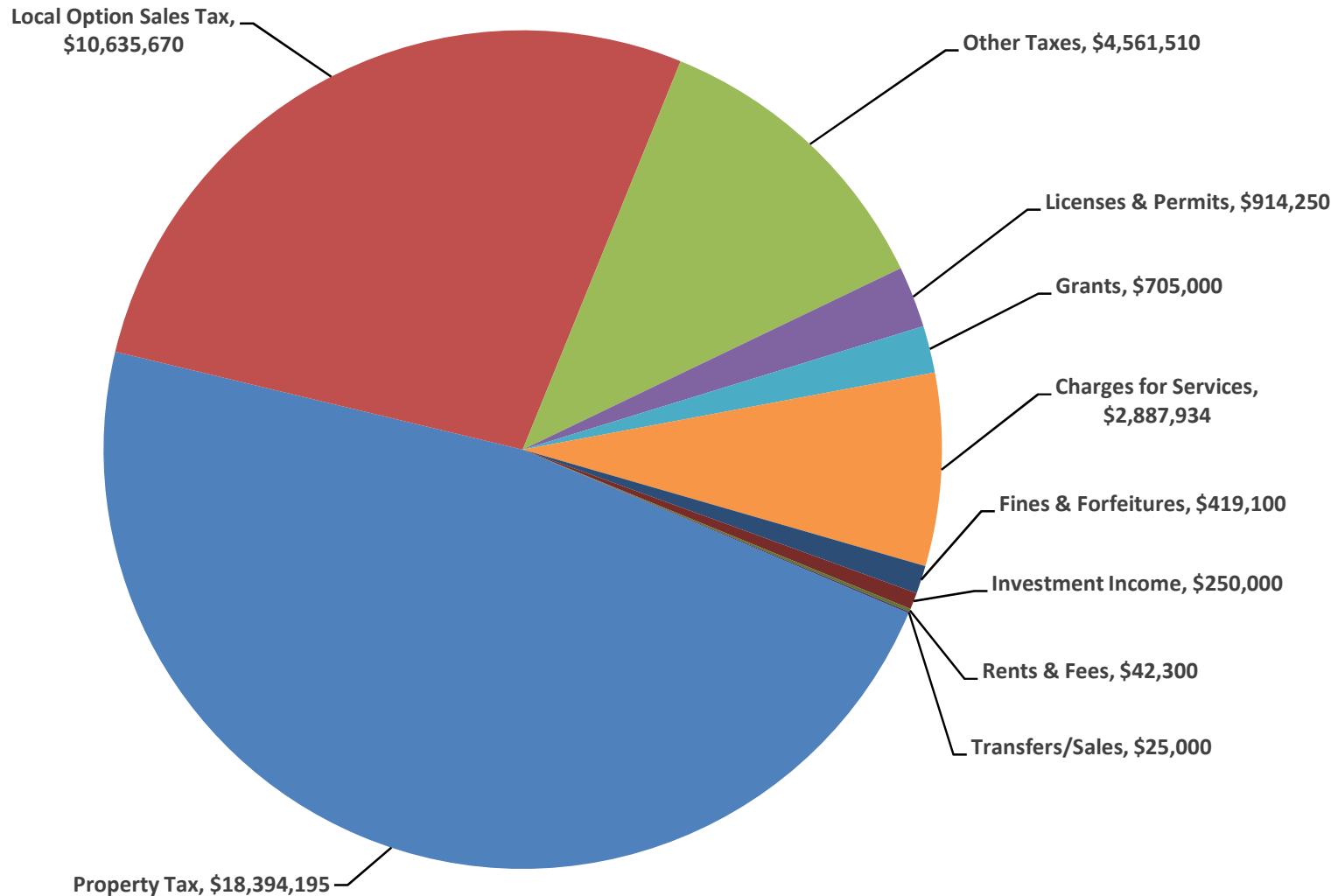
FY24 Budget General Fund Revenues

Function	Amount
Property Tax	\$ 18,394,195
Local Option Sales Tax	\$ 10,635,670
Other Taxes	\$ 4,561,510
Licenses & Permits	\$ 914,250
Grants	\$ 705,000
Charges for Services	\$ 2,887,934
Fines & Forfeitures	\$ 419,100
Investment Income	\$ 250,000
Rents & Fees	\$ 42,300
Transfers/Sales	\$ 25,000
Total	\$ 38,834,959

*Budget as originally adopted July 1, 2023

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

FY24 Budget General Fund Revenues



Water Resources



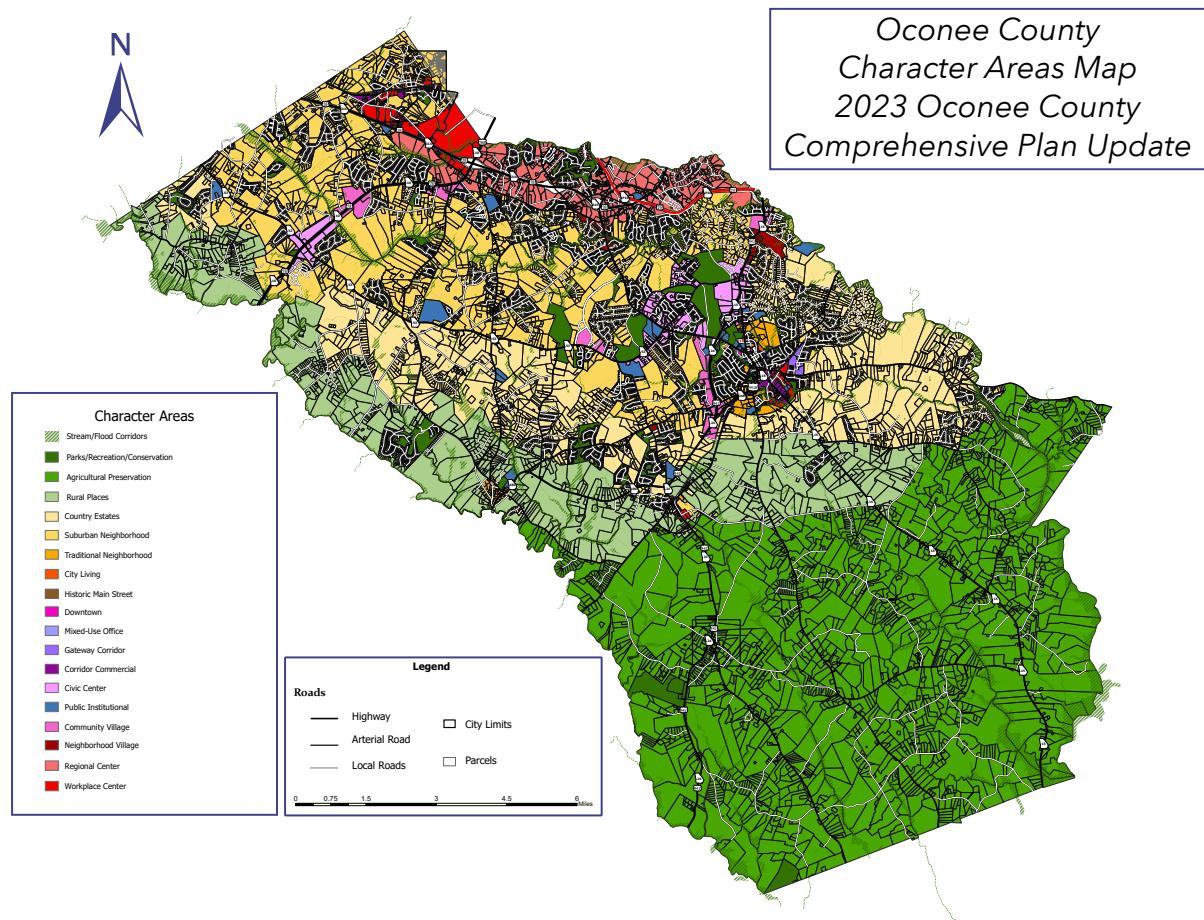
Accomplishments

- 187 meter sets
- 247 service line repairs
- Phase 1 of Calls Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility upgrade completed
- Daniels Bridge force main upgrade nearing completion
- Initiated development of a comprehensive sewer model, which will provide greater strategic planning on health and maintenance of the system
- Bear Creek Water Treatment Facility upgrade design nearing completion

Planning & Code Enforcement

By the Numbers

- Final Plats - 8
- Administrative Plats - 69
- Variances - 20
- Administrative Variances - 6
- Rezone - 38
- Special Use - 13
- Commercial Development Permits - 14
- Residential Development Permits - 3
- Preliminary Plats - 14
- Preliminary Site Plans - 24
- Single Family Residential Building Permits - 178
- Non-residential Building Permits - 456
- Code Enforcement Issues - 174
- Business License - 1596



Public Works/Transportation

Accomplishments

- Issued 160 utility permits for work in the County's right-of-way
- Resurfaced 11.84 miles of roads
- The roundabout at SR 15 and Summit Grove Drive/New Administrative Building opened to traffic
- Restriped 26.08 centerline miles of County roadways
- Cracksealed 11.36 centerline miles of County roadways
- Completed the Malcom Bridge Road median u-turn project
- Completed operational improvements at Oconee Connector and Parkway Boulevard to install left turn phases on Parkway Boulevard and the shopping center



Fire Rescue

New Recruit Firefighter 1 Training

Oconee Fire Rescue graduated three volunteers with a National Firefighter 1 Certification. The volunteer recruits completed 227 hours of fire training with over 150 hands-on practicals. The recruits also participated in Live Fire training to become experienced in extinguishing structure fires. OCFR's Firefighter 1 training certification is the same as most career fire departments.

New Recruit Firefighter 2 Training

Oconee Fire Rescue graduated five volunteers with a National Firefighter 2 Certification. The volunteer recruits completed 65 hours of fire training with over 50 hands-on practicals.

Locations:

Station 1 Watkinsville

7580 Macon Highway, Watkinsville

Station 2 Farmington

2590 Old Farmington Road, Watkinsville

Station 4 Dark Corner

7620 Hog Mountain Rd, Statham

Station 5 East Oconee

4931 Greensboro Highway, Watkinsville

Station 6 High Shoals

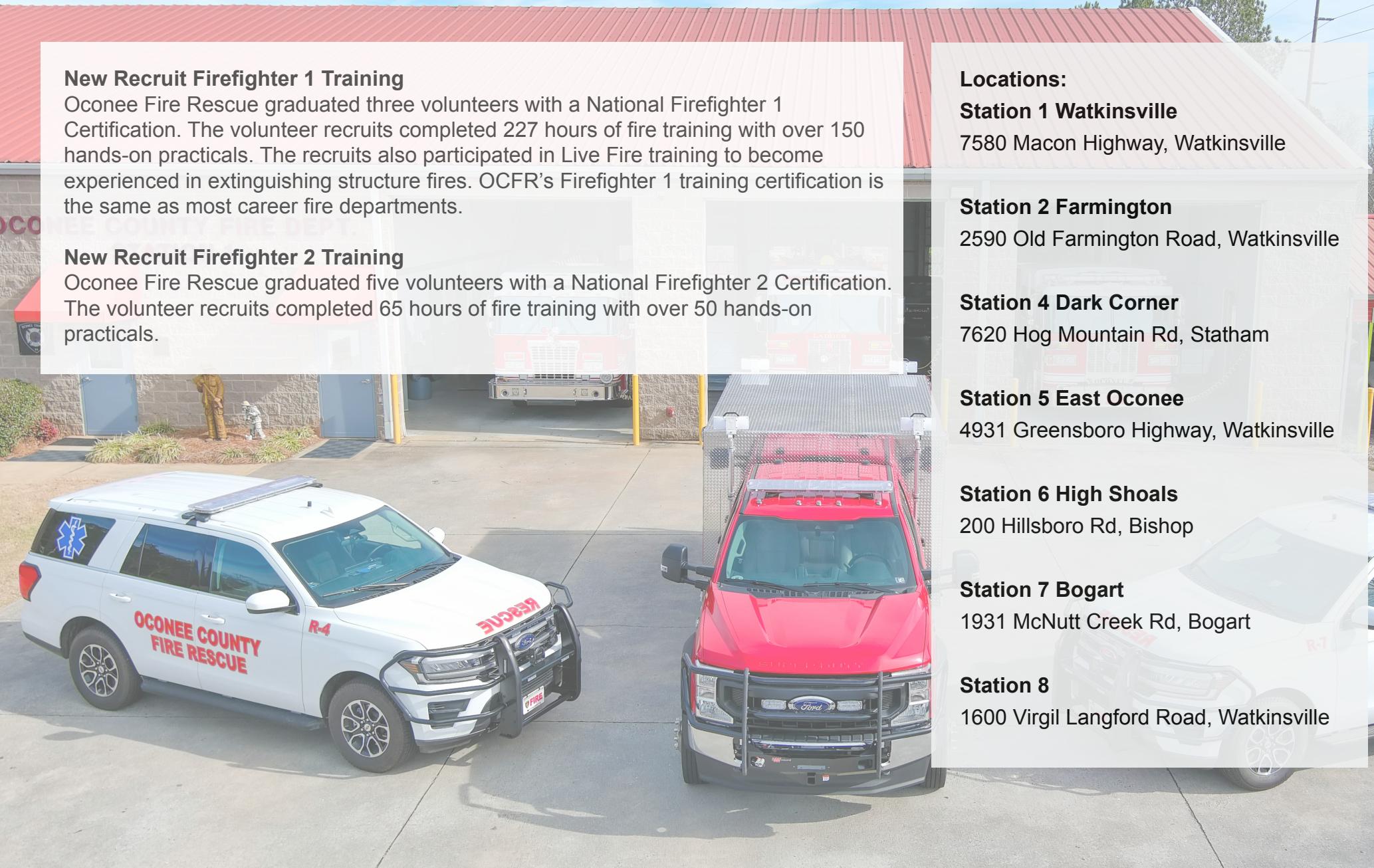
200 Hillsboro Rd, Bishop

Station 7 Bogart

1931 McNutt Creek Rd, Bogart

Station 8

1600 Virgil Langford Road, Watkinsville



Fire Rescue

New Trucks

Oconee County Fire Rescue acquired a new Air & Light Truck and two Rescue trucks. The Air & Light Truck is used countywide to replenish breathing air for firefighter's breathing apparatus. The Rescue Trucks have a variety of medical rescue supplies and provide quick responses to medical emergencies.

ISO Rating

Oconee County Fire Rescue solidified the ISO rating of 4/4X after an evaluation. Fire Rescue, Water Resources, and the Sheriff's Office 911 Communication Center contributed to the ISO rating.

Fire Safety Classes

Oconee County Fire Rescue provided the Fire Safety House to all K-3rd grades in Oconee school system.

Jaws of Life

Oconee County Fire Rescue acquired one set of Battery-Operated Jaws of Life this year. The Battery-Operated Jaws of Life equipment replaced older hydraulic powered extrication equipment. The new Battery-Operated Jaws of Life are more versatile and can be easily deployed to off-road incidents. OCFR now has six sets of Battery-Operated Jaws of Life at fire stations in the county.

Breathing Air Compressor

Oconee County Fire Rescue acquired one Breathing Air Compressor system this year though a FEMA grant. The Breathing Air Compressor system allows Firefighters to refill their (SCBA) self-contained breathing apparatus air cylinders. SCBA's are used by Firefighters on structure fires, car fires, hazardous materials incidents, training drills, etc. OCFR now has four Breathing Air Compressor systems at fire stations in the county.

New Recruit Medical Training

Oconee County Fire Rescue graduated seven volunteers with (EMR) Emergency Medical Responder medical training. The Sheriff's Office also had four deputies complete the EMR training. The volunteer medical recruits completed 128 hours of medical training with practicals. The recruits also rode on National EMS ambulances to gain additional knowledge on assisting patients with medical emergencies. The volunteer EMR's reside over the entire county and can provide medical care prior to an ambulance arrival.

Parks & Recreation



Park Projects

- Park Plan updates and County Trail Plan completed
- Oconee Veterans Park Gym and Fitness Center HVAC system replaced
- Oconee Veterans Park Fitness Center and Indoor Track lights replaced with LED lighting
- Herman C. Michael Park Gym and Outdoor Basketball Court lights replaced with LED lighting
- Bogart Sports Complex outdoor walking path trenched
- Heritage Park emergency access roads repaired

Georgia Recreation & Parks Association Awards

- State Agency of the Year (population 20,001-50,000)
- District 7 Agency of the Year (population 30,001-80,000)
- District 7 Student of the Year – Hunter Rainey
- District 7 Programmer of the Year – Jake Thornton
- District 7 Professional Administrator of the Year – Zach Churchill
- State and District Volunteer of the Year – Jon Harvey

Parks & Recreation



Parks & Rec by the Numbers

- 17,888 program and user group participants
- 18,974 volunteer hours given
- 33,606 open gym/fitness center check-ins
- 841 park reservations
- 629 park acres managed
- 40 athletic fields/courts maintained

The Oconee County Parks & Recreation Department manages four parks and runs a vibrant program of youth and adult activities throughout the year with an ever-growing roster of participants.

Parks and Recreation again renewed its Better Sports for Kids Program Provider national designation, highlighting its commitment to providing a safe, high-quality sports environment for the next generation.

Special Events

- Touch a Truck
- Youth Bike Rodeo
- Trick or Treat Trail

Partnerships

- Oconee Parks Foundation provided support for programs and special events
- Boy Scout project added two benches and two picnic tables at Heritage Park
- Held 9 Volunteer Workdays at Heritage Park for Invasive Species Removal
- Hosted the Little League All District Baseball Tournament

Senior Center



By the Numbers

- 15,260 meals served to both congregate and home-delivered meal clients
- 13,474 miles logged providing trips to and from the center for clients
- 1,610 miles logged by 32 volunteers delivering meals to homebound clients through Meals on Wheels

Regional Host

In December, the Senior Center hosted the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging's Regional Public Hearing. Over 150 participants attended from Walton, Jasper, Athens-Clarke, Jackson, Elbert, Madison, and Morgan Counties.

Oconee County Management Development Program Gives Back to Seniors

The inaugural class of Oconee County's Management Development Program partnered with the Senior Center to provide a donation to the Center's Rainy Day Fund. This fund helps seniors with emergency expenses that they would not otherwise be able to afford, such as water heater and minor HVAC repair.

This service-learning project was designed to address a current need in the county while allowing participants to use their current skill sets and grow new skills, as they provided a community-based service.

The project raised \$1,800 dollars for the Rainy Day Fund, and was not only an overwhelming success, but an invaluable experience for all those involved. These team members showed outstanding leadership in giving back to the community!

Keep Oconee County Beautiful

In 2023, The Keep Oconee County Beautiful Commission (KOCBC) again received the Governor's Circle Award, presented by the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation, in recognition of KOCBC's outstanding and ongoing work to reduce litter, minimize waste, and beautify the community. KOCBC was also recognized by Keep America Beautiful with the President's Circle Award.

KOCBC activities included:

- Arbor Day tree giveaway
- Invasive Plant Removal Work Days at Heritage Park
- Bring One for the Chipper holiday tree recycling
- Dirty Dozen Road Cleanups
- Annual Great American Cleanup
- Choose Your Own Adventure Plogging/Trash Dash Challenge
- Annual Litter Index
- PopUp Plant Giveaways at Oconee County Library
- Annual Great Georgia Pollinator Census
- Dawg Day of Service
- Halloween Candy Wrapper Recycling
- Third Grade Ag Day
- TREX Plastic Film Challenge
- Month-long Battery and Tire Amnesty, as well as Bulky Item Amnesty
- Spring and Fall Drive thru Shred Day
- Adopt a Mile Cleanups



Elections

2023 was a year of ongoing change in elections. In February, the State of Georgia rolled out a new voter registration system, GARVIS (Georgia Registered Voter Information System). Elector list maintenance processes were conducted as part of an ongoing effort to maintain clean voter rolls.

In February, staff attended the mandatory annual training offered by the Carl Vinson Institute of Georgia for the GAVREO Association (Georgia Association of Voter Registration and Election Officials). The Elections website was upgraded in July in order to provide an improved user experience and contains a wealth of helpful information for Oconee County citizens. The office welcomed Noah Armstrong, Elections Technician, to the team in September, just in time for the November City of Watkinsville Election. The Elections Office conducted this Election in November, which had a turnout of 19.65%. Election staff ended the year making preparations for the upcoming 2024 Election Cycle.



Civic Center



The Oconee County Civic Center hosted over 300 events during 2023 ranging from school programs to nationally touring concerts and regional exhibitions.

The various areas of the Civic Center were booked by the Oconee County School System 184 times, Oconee County Government Offices 71 times, and outside organizations 124 times.

Civic Center staff also provide event and production services for many events held away from the Civic Center such as Veteran's Day Celebrations and the Watkinsville Christmas Parade.



Libraries



2023 Library Stats

- The library circulated over 300,000 items in FY 22-23
- Over 37,000 people participated in library programs FY 22-23
- Patrons logged over 20,000 sessions of computer and internet usage
- Over a 100 groups used library meeting rooms

Library Locations

Oconee County Library
1925 Electric Avenue
Watkinsville
762-999-1577

Bogart Library
200 Burson Avenue
Bogart
706-310-3515

Libraries

New Library Services:

- New Learning Kits
- Tween Programming
- Chromebooks and Tablets for patrons to check out
- Spring Into Wellness and Harvest in the Park events

Ongoing Library Services:

- Access to technology (Wi-Fi Hotspots, Chromebooks, audio editing software, high speed internet access, and more)
- Family literacy events
- Art exhibits
- Hands-on arts/activities for all ages
- Online resources (digital eBooks, audiobooks, videos, magazines, GALILEO, language learning, test prep, career)
- Museum and park passes for checkout (including Shakespeare Tavern and Alliance Theater)
- Book clubs
- STEAM programming
- One on One technology help
- Seed Library
- Puzzle Collection
- Monthly take and make crafts
- Genealogy research
- Culinary literacy classes
- Ukulele, children's learning kits complete with books and hands-on STEAM activities
- Free and accessible meeting space for community groups
- Board Games, Puzzles, and Records for check out
- Active Library Friends group with twice annual book sale

Tourism & Visitors Bureau



video series. This series focuses on local products that make Oconee truly unique.

The Tourism and Visitors Bureau contributed in the planning and execution of the Watkinsville Christmas Parade and hosted pictures with Santa following the annual tree lighting.

2023 was a busy and exciting year for the Tourism department. Over 2,000 visitors came to the Welcome Center and the Eagle Tavern, not including the number of tourists local businesses and restaurants served.

The Welcome Center moved their office from downtown Watkinsville to the historic William Daniell house in August.

In the fall the Watkinsville Haunted History Walking Tours were in demand, and "The Haunting of the Eagle Tavern" aired on GPB on and will continue to air in coming years.

This year, the Tourism and Visitors Bureau commissioned local photographer and videographer Chris Greer to create the "Made in Oconee"

Animal Services



Oconee County Animal Services staff works hard every day to manage and protect the animal population in the county, enforce animal services ordinances, protect the health and welfare of citizens, and find homes for animals that need them.

By the Numbers:

Calls for Service: 753
Impounds - Cats: 706
Impounds - Dogs: 406
Adoptions: 553
Agency Transfers: 355
Return to Owner: 96

Best friends are waiting for you at Oconee County Animal Services!

**Oconee County
Animal Services
1171 Branch Road, Bishop
706-769-3956**

Quick Contact List

ACTS	770-725-2330	Human Resources	706-769-3938
Adult Literacy	706-552-0968	Jail	706-769-3930
Animal Services	706-769-3956	KOCBC	706-310-3560
Board of Commissioners	706-769-5120	Landfill – Macon Highway	706-769-3915
Board of Elections & Registration	706-769-3958	Library, Watkinsville	762-999-1577
Chamber of Commerce	706-769-7947	Library, Bogart	706-310-3515
City Hall, Watkinsville	706-769-5161	Magistrate Court	706-769-3940
Civic Center	706-769-3902	Parks & Recreation	706-769-3965
Clerk of Superior Court	706-769-3940	Planning Department	706-769-3910
Code Enforcement	706-769-3907	Police, Watkinsville – Non Emer.	706-769-7891
Collection Site – Butler's Crossing	706-431-0860	Post Office, Watkinsville	706-769-6980
Collection Site – Highway 15	706-431-0859	Probate Court Office	706-769-3936
Collection Site – Highway 53	706-431-0861	Probation Office – Providence	706-310-4466
Collection Site – Mars Hill Rd	706-431-0644	Property Appraisal Office	706-769-3921
Communications	706-310-3556	Public Works Department	706-769-2937
Coroner's Office	706-769-2988	Road Department	706-769-3912
County Extension/4H	706-769-3946	Sanitation (Public Works)	706-769-2937
DFCS	706-310-2260	Senior Center	706-769-3979
District Attorney	706-769-3954	Sheriff (Non Emergency)	706-769-5665
Eagle Tavern Museum	706-769-8730	Sheriff (Administration)	706-769-3945
EMA	706-310-3600	Stormwater Mgt. (Public Works)	706-769-2937
Environmental Health	706-769-7060	Tax Commissioner	706-769-3917
Family Connection	706-769-4974	USDA, FSA, NRCS	706-769-3990
Finance & Procurement	706-769-2944	Water Resources	706-769-3960
Fire Department	706-769-3975	Welcome Center	706-769-5197
Health Department	706-769-3983		