

City of Suwanee

2009 Annual Report

It's a Wonderful Story

How Suwanee Became One of America's Best Places to Live

In the holiday movie classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, Jimmy Stewart's character George Bailey is given the "gift" of seeing what life would be like in his hometown had he not been an active part of the community. It's almost impossible to tell that George Bailey's Bedford Falls and the but-for-him Pottersville are actually the same town, each a realization of the choices made by community leaders and citizens.

While not as sharp as the differences between Bedford Falls and Pottersville, the changes in the City of Suwanee today and the Suwanee of 10 years ago are nothing less than astonishing. The evolution of our community, which now has twice been named to *Money* magazine's list of top small towns in which to live, brings a much higher quality of life certainly than the tawdry Pottersville and even the very welcoming, friendly Suwanee of 2000.



David Douglas

It's significant to note, that the Suwanee of 2010 is not the result of efforts undertaken by a single Hollywood-made hero, but rather the energy, innovation, commitment to excellence – and maybe even the naiveté – of a cadre of citizens, elected officials, staff members, business owners, consultants, and others willing to work together to shape and share their vision. To use another movie metaphor, Suwanee's ability to achieve so much in so little time is the result of "a perfect storm" of personalities and circumstances, not the least of which included, until recently, a growing, robust economy.

As we moved into a new millennium, Suwanee residents, through the 2020 comprehensive planning process, forged a new vision for their community. Perhaps the seminal event of the past decade was voters' approval in November 2001 of \$17.7 million in bonds to be used to acquire greenspace and create new parks and trails. It was citizens' bold vision –

There's a lot more to our story...inside

and action – that ignited Suwanee’s sustained momentum and made possible many of the achievements that would follow.

It’s difficult to imagine what the Suwanee of 2010 might look like had the decisions that were made been different or less bold – perhaps a commercial supercenter of some sort would now occupy the Town Center site.

As we pause to gain perspective on the astonishing transformation that has taken place over the past decade, we also celebrate the most recent accomplishments of 2009. The past year was a challenging one economically for Main Streets across the country, and Suwanee was no exception. Still, there were many achievements in 2009 that serve to provide the exclamation point to what can only be described as an outstanding decade. Consider the new, iconic City Hall, the 15 awards Suwanee picked up in 2009, and the release of data that shows that 97 percent of surveyed citizens find Suwanee an excellent or good place to live.



“Town Center has given Suwanee a much needed common space of interest and character...[It’s] a great brand that other communities recognize and respect. With this, Suwanee has become less about where my family has a house and more about where we make our home.” -Jeff Spence



While the recent turn of the calendar page presents a welcomed opportunity to reflect, it also represents an opportunity to renew our commitment to thinking outside the box, to excellence, and, like George Bailey, to loyalty and hard work. As community leaders, dedicated staff, and everyday citizens, we can – together – continue to transform Suwanee into a truly world-class community. After all, while Suwanee may indeed offer a wonderful life, it’s far from perfect.

The Suwanee Story Encapsulated – 2000-2009

2000

The Atlanta Falcons move their team headquarters and training facilities from Suwanee to Flowery Branch.

January
The Suwanee Police Department earns state certification for the first time.

February
Suwanee is designated a Tree City USA for the 10th consecutive year.

June
The Suwanee Business Alliance presents the City’s first concert series. The Concert in the Park series, which lasts five years, brings thousands of people to the Burnette-Rogers Pavilion in Old Town.

September
UGA design students participating in a charette are the first to suggest that Suwanee’s community gathering place might be better located outside of historic Old Town.

October
First Citizens Police Academy is offered.

November
City Council adopts 2020 Comprehensive Master Plan, signaling a new era of land-use planning for Suwanee.

Suwanee remains fiscally fit despite 2009's historic economic challenges

In many ways, 2009 was an outstanding year for the City of Suwanee. Still, the pall of our nation's enduring historic recession shadowed the year's triumphs and influenced many of the decisions made throughout the year. Luckily, in large measure due to a tradition of sound, conservative fiscal management, the City of Suwanee remains in a financially healthier position than many communities and is poised to take advantage of opportunities as the economy recovers.

- To address a decrease in revenues, the City cut overall expenditures by about 5 percent, eliminated four staff positions, reduced overtime, and suspended employee wellness and adult education programs. In addition, employee salaries were frozen.
- When Gwinnett County cut back on maintenance of roadway rights-of-way in the fall due to budgetary issues, the City took on limited mowing of McGinnis Ferry Road and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.
- The 2009 millage rate was set at 5.77 mills, the same rate as the previous four years.
- Replacement of some of the City's water lines and installation of a new drinking water well were made possible when Suwanee received approximately \$480,000 through a federal stimulus loan; the loan offers 40 percent principal forgiveness, which equals about \$192,000. Work on this project began late in the fall.

Then & Now

	2000	2010
Population .....	.8,725	16,670
Households .....	.3,144	6,082
Residential construction permits .....	.452 (342 multifamily)	.32*
<i>At the peak of Suwanee's growth over the past decade, 562 residential construction permits were issued in 2005; of that number, 299 were single-family, 240 were townhomes, and 23 were multifamily.</i>		
Business licenses issued .....	.692	1,721*
Suwanee's unemployment rate	2.7%	3.9%*
<i>Georgia's unemployment rate was 10.2% in October 2009 while Gwinnett County's was 9.4%. In 2005, Suwanee's unemployment rate was 4.8%.</i>		
Est. Real Property Taxable Value (Residential & Commercial)	\$.928,038,528	\$.2,906,635,750
Per capita personal income	\$.31,863	\$.33,163*

*2009 figures

- Economic stimulus funds received through a U.S. Department of Justice grant were used to help launch a permanent DUI Task Force.
- Fitch Ratings affirmed Suwanee's AA- bond rating, noting that Suwanee continues to "improv[e] upon an already strong balance sheet."

Did you know?

A Department of Community Affairs survey of 44 similar communities throughout Georgia found that municipal governments' average number of employees per 1,000 residents was 10.62. Suwanee's is 5.22.

2001

January
Downtown Development Authority is established and focuses on revitalization, redevelopment, and promotion.

September
The Recreation and Open Space Needs Assessment identifies top-priority properties to be acquired to meet community's desire to preserve greenspace and have more parks.

The first Suwanee Day Classic 5K is run.

November
Suwanee voters approve a \$17.7 million open space bond referendum.

The Old Suwanee neighborhood receives the Atlanta Regional Commission's Development of Excellence Award.

2002

February
The Old Town Master Plan calls for creation of a Town Center outside of historic Old Town, but with linkages and connections back to it.

Police & Citizens Together (PACT), a neighborhood watch program unique to Suwanee, is begun. Later in the year, Ruby Forest will become the first neighborhood to be certified.

Openings, launches, beginnings

When Suwanee's new iconic City Hall opened its doors for the first time in February, it impressively fulfilled its architectural function as the focal point of Town Center. Since then, it has proven to efficiently serve the civic purpose that had been envisioned for Town Center some seven years earlier. The distinctive building, which appears more grand than its relatively modest 23,600 square feet, has received largely favorable reviews from citizens and out-of-town visitors alike. (Rumor has it that the building is popular with the superhero set as well.)

- The City Hall grand opening celebration featured a unique "human aerial art" photograph in which more than 1,000 area residents participated. As would prove true for many of the year's community events, rainy weather was a factor – guess the economy wasn't the only dark cloud in 2009 – forcing the City to extend the celebration to a second day so that the community photo could be taken.
- The seeds for Suwanee's new organic community garden, Harvest Farm at White Street Park, were sown this year. With the assistance of a 16-member citizen Founders Committee as well as a design consultant "dream team," the park master plan was completed, guidelines for the garden's inaugural 2010 season established, and construction gotten underway.
- After years of planning and negotiations with the railroad, the pedestrian underpass was completed. An Atlanta Regional Commission Livable Cities Initiative grant covered much of the cost of the tunnel, which makes walking between Town Center and historic Old Town much more safe and convenient.
- Renovation of the former City Hall was nearly completed in 2009, providing some much needed space for Suwanee's cramped police department.
- This spring Suwanee took the plunge into the world of social media, establishing Facebook and Twitter accounts, as yet one more way to engage in conversation and build relationships with citizens, especially younger residents who might not typically access more traditional communication tools.



Steve Hogben

The Suwanee Story Encapsulated – 2000-2009

2002

March

Suwanee receives a AA- bond rating and the following month issues its general obligation bonds in order to purchase land for open space and parks.

April

The first open space bond purchase is of 85 acres along Suwanee Creek. The property now encompasses Suwanee Creek Park.

October

Suwanee's Urban Development Agency uses a low-cost loan to purchase 13 acres at Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road and Buford Highway for nearly \$1.5 million. The property is designated for mixed-use development following the goals outlined in the Old Town Master Plan.

November

Using \$2.1 million in voter-approved open space bond funds, the City purchases 10 acres at the same location for a new urban park.





- Setting an example for what it is asking of developers, the City of Suwanee committed 1 percent of City Hall construction costs to public art. After considering more than 100 artist qualifications and 29 invited proposals, the citizen-based Public Arts Commission selected a suspended sculpture created by world-renowned industrial artist Koryn Rolstad to be installed at City Hall. *Shimmering Echoes* will be installed early in 2010.

"This is by far the coolest City Hall I've ever been in. It definitely makes an impact. I wouldn't expect that the premiere building [at Town Center] that jumps out at me would be City Hall. It doesn't have that icky government feeling."
 - Cam Haggerty

Then & Now

	2000	2010
Square footage of City Hall	6,170	23,600
Full-time City employees	41	84
<i>In 2000, Suwanee had 24 police personnel and three public works staff members; the City in 2009 had 44 police positions and 15 public works staff.</i>		
Park acreage	16	342
Police calls for service	24,845	39,453*
Facebook fans	0	2,744+
Visitors to www.suwanee.com	25,015 (2001)	383,266*
Computer servers	1	18

*2009 figures

- The public works department consolidated and moved headquarters to a facility along Buford Highway. The new facility allows the department to store supplies and equipment in a controlled environment, provides desk and locker space as well as a training room, and offers space to store seasonal materials (such as banners and holiday decorations) so that they may be re-used more efficiently.
- The Downtown Development Authority launched www.downtown-suwanee.com in the fall to provide information about shopping, dining, and activities in Town Center and Old Town. New wayfinding signs at major gateways to Old Town provide more traditional guidance to businesses and facilities.

2003

January

City purchases 24 acres on either side of Suwanee Dam Road, part of which will later become PlayTown Suwanee, and 61 acres along Suwanee Dam Road, which will later become Sims Lake Park.

The Georgia Municipal Association and *Georgia Trend* magazine name Suwanee a City of Excellence.

June

The Suwanee Farmers Market opens in the parking lot of City Hall.

October

Suwanee's Municipal Court moves into the renovated Crossroads Center, which had served as the City's original City Hall until 1997.

November

In an evening to remember, the Suwanee Soiree auction, part of the Better Parks Campaign, raises funds for an interactive fountain at Town Center Park.

December 24

Town Center Park opens, becoming the first park to be completed through Suwanee's Open Space Initiative.

Impressive and Notable

Results from Suwanee's first National Citizen Survey, which became available in February, indicate a remarkable degree of resident satisfaction. Overall quality of life in Suwanee was rated as good or excellent by 95 percent of respondents while 97 percent said Suwanee was an excellent or good place to live. In September, Suwanee received two Voice of the People Awards for Excellence for being one of the surveyed jurisdictions with the highest citizen-rated services in 2008 in two areas: recreation programs/classes and parks. The awards were presented by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and National Research Center.



David Douglas

- Suwanee became the first in Gwinnett County to earn "Green Community" certification from the Atlanta Regional Commission for taking measures to reduce its environmental impact and promote sustainability. City Hall's design and construction to meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards and the City's environmentally preferable purchasing policy are just two examples of how Suwanee is thinking green.

Then: 2020 Comprehensive Plan (Adopted in 2001)

"In the 21st century, Suwanee will be a thriving community with distinct character areas that give our City a unique identity within Gwinnett County and the greater metropolitan area of Atlanta. We will be a place where inevitable growth is managed at a human scale and where new development is encouraged to integrate living, working, shopping, and playing in close proximity to one another.... We will be a City that strongly values our green spaces."

Now: 2030 Community Agenda (Adopted in 2009)

"The plan...recognizes that for the first time in Suwanee's history, future growth will need to be accommodated to a large degree on redeveloped land, not greenfield sites. The plan seeks to control and channel this redevelopment in the most beneficial and least disruptive way, by focusing on key areas [i.e., Suwanee Gateway, Town Center, Peachtree Industrial/Suwanee Dam intersection, and McGinnis Ferry/Burford Highway area].... As a result, existing residential areas within the City are largely protected from intense new development or redevelopment."

- Citizens and community organizations provided more than 800 volunteer hours to, among other things, plant trees at Sims Lake Park, install bluebird and bat houses as well as trail markers along the Suwanee Creek Greenway, and build benches at Sims Lake Park.
- The 2030 Comprehensive Plan/Community Agenda, created through a nine-month, citizen-intensive process in 2008, was officially adopted in January. For the first time, the plan ties Suwanee's future growth and economic viability to redevelopment.
- Suwanee once again made *Money* magazine's list of America's Best Places to Live, coming in at 35 out of a database of nearly 1,800 communities with populations 8,500 to 50,000.

The Suwanee Story Encapsulated – 2000-2009

2004

May
A three-mile extension to the one-mile Richard Trice Trail opens, creating the Suwanee Creek Greenway.

Suwanee's first park patrol officer takes to the Greenway via bicycle.

June 9-13
Some 1,200 dads, moms, sisters, brothers, grandmas, and grandpas work together over five days to create PlayTown Suwanee.

July
Eager buyers camp overnight to be the first to purchase lots/homes in the Shadow-brook at Town Center neighborhood.

August
Suwanee Creek Park opens.

August 14
Shawn Mullins and Drivin' n Cryin' perform at the Town Center Park grand opening concert.

September 18
Though its kick-off is delayed a few hours due to Hurricane Ivan's visit the day before, Suwanee Day's move to Town Center Park receives rave reviews.

October
The Gwinnett County Public Library opens the Suwanee branch.

- Suwanee became the first municipal government to twice be named a co-winner of the Atlanta Regional Commission's prestigious Development of Excellence Award. This time around, it was Town Center that was recognized.
- Community policing efforts received a nod when Suwanee was selected as a finalist among communities with populations less than 20,000 for the 2009 International Association of Chiefs of Police/CISCO Community Policing Award.



Developers Corbitt Woods of Bowen Family Homes, Art Richardson of Main Street Corners, and Ed Allen of Madison Retail as well as Suwanee Mayor Dave Williams accepted in November the Atlanta Regional Commission's Development of Excellence Award for Town Center.

Did you know?

Suwanee's public works department completed 5,044 work orders in 2009. That's 1,001 more than in 2008.

Also, Suwanee's Police and Citizens Together program was featured in the April issue of *The Police Chief* magazine.

- The adopted Downtown Master Plan calls for better connections between Town Center and historic Old Town. Among the measures identified in the plan, which the City already has begun, are a community garden and Buford Highway corridor study.



Dick Goodman

"One of the reasons I chose to move to Suwanee in 1999 is that it is a 'small town' with a very high quality of life not found in many of the other metro Atlanta communities... [O]ne of the greatest things about living in Suwanee [is] the fact that our City government really cares about its citizens. Every single time I have had a question or comment over the past 10 years, I have emailed or called, and gotten a prompt, courteous, and informed response."

- Kathy Voss

November
Passage of House Bill 709 and county voters' approval of the 2005 SPLOST program lead to Suwanee and other cities receiving enhanced allocations of such funds based on population size.

2005

April
The City pays off its nearly \$1.5 million urban redevelopment loan, used to purchase the 13-acre mixed-use tract at Town Center, eight years early.

The Suwanee DDA purchases the former Pierce's Corner Antiques building.

A new - taller and larger - water tank is installed in Old Town.

May
The month-long Art on a Limb program is begun.

May 21
The band The America performs in Town Center Park, drawing a crowd of about 13,000, the largest at the park to date.

October
The I-85 Business District Competitive Assessment and Development Strategy Report outlines tactics for improving and revitalizing the I-85 commercial district.

A few more firsts...and some sequels

- The HAWK pedestrian-activated signal installed at Buford Highway and Town Center Avenue is the first to be implemented in Georgia and earned Suwanee a Golden Shoe Award from the Atlanta-based PEDS organization.
- Suwanee's municipal court became the first in Gwinnett County to go paperless when it adopted a new software system late in the year. The new system will enhance productivity, workflow, efficiency, and customer service.
- The City received its first individual National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit for the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System. What this means is that the City of Suwanee has met federal and state standards as relates to all pollutants that can impact water quality (e.g., soil erosion, waste water, stormwater, etc.). Previously, the City of Suwanee was permitted jointly with Gwinnett County.
- The police department once again implemented its Suwanee CARES enhanced traffic enforcement program along the Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road corridor in May and June. The program resulted in a 20.5 percent reduction in crashes and led to 56 related arrests.
- Among 19 City-sponsored or co-sponsored events in 2009 were several first-time ones, including Paddle in the Park at Sims Lake and Festa della Pasta in Old Town.
- The volunteer-based Suwanee Arts Partnership was established in 2009. The group will work in conjunction with the Public Arts Commission to raise funds for and awareness of public art.
- Suwanee held its first online surplus auction. The sale of surplus office furniture brought in \$4,397.77.
- The City resurrected its Gateway TEE (Total Elimination of Eyesores) initiative, which was first undertaken in 2006. This time around, City staff spent a day in April documenting 198 items – from overgrown weeds to graffiti to codes violations – that needed attention. By the end of the year, nearly 70 percent of the items had been addressed.



The Suwanee Story Encapsulated – 2000-2009

2006

April
Main Street Corners, the first mixed-use building at Town Center, is completed and the first three businesses open.

June 17
The Big Splash interactive fountain opens during a community celebration that also serves as a fundraiser for sister city Long Beach, Mississippi, which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

August
BRPH is selected through a competition to design Suwanee's new City Hall.



Brian McDonald



Then & Now

	2000	2010
Traffic citations issued	5,350 (0%)	11,715 (75%)*
(% issued electronically) <i>Of the total citations issued in 2009, 108 were for DUI, 2,674 for failure to use seatbelts, and 3,192 for speeding.</i>		
Traffic accidents . . . . .	.620	1,113*
Miles of City-maintained roads . . . . .	.41	.60
% of police officers with college degrees	29	59
Citizens Police Academy grads (total)	19	286*
City-Sponsored Events . . . . .	.6	.19* (15 add'l. private)
Suwanee Day attendees	6,000	40,000 (2008)

*2009 figures



David Douglas

Did you know?

Suwanee's new paperless court system will save approximately 51,600 pieces of paper each year.

2007

January

Suwanee receives a Trendsetter Award from the Georgia Municipal Association and *Georgia Trend* Magazine for the third consecutive year. The City was recognized for its open space initiative, community involvement, and Town Center.

April

A mural created during an international gathering of sign artists in Suwanee the previous fall is unveiled and installed on the back wall of the Town Center amphitheater stage.

June

Sponsored by Peoples Bank & Trust, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra performs at Town Center Park.

July

Money ranks Suwanee as number 10 on the magazine's list of best places (small cities) to live.

November

Voters authorize the City to create tax allocation districts as a potential tool for redevelopment purposes.

Construction of a new City Hall at Town Center gets underway.

A new pedestrian bridge/trail connects Town Center and the Suwanee Creek Greenway.



Dick Goodman

- Suwanee First United Methodist Church was the first recipient of the Downtown Development Authority's façade grant program. The church used the \$2,500 matching grant, generously provided by BB&T Bank, to make minor repairs and repaint its exterior.
- Fourteen winners in the first Snap Suwanee photo competition had their photographs exhibited throughout the year at City Hall.

"My family rented the Alder Pavilion...for my son's birthday party...The park and pavilion were so well kept and clean - even the bathrooms were great! Your staff does a wonderful job keeping the park beautiful!"
 - Beth Sudderth



David Douglas

The Suwanee Story Encapsulated – 2000-2009

2008

January
 A branding campaign is launched to help re-introduce the I-85 area as the Suwanee Gateway.

March
 Public Arts Commission is established to help enhance quality of life in Suwanee through public art.

April
 Tour de Georgia hosts a stage start at Town Center.

November
 Sims Lake Park opens.

2009

See information throughout this annual report.

2009 General Fund

The "Transfer out" category includes debt service funds and transfers to capital projects. Here's how these funds were allocated:

Debt Service
(open space and City Hall bonds)
\$1,627,000

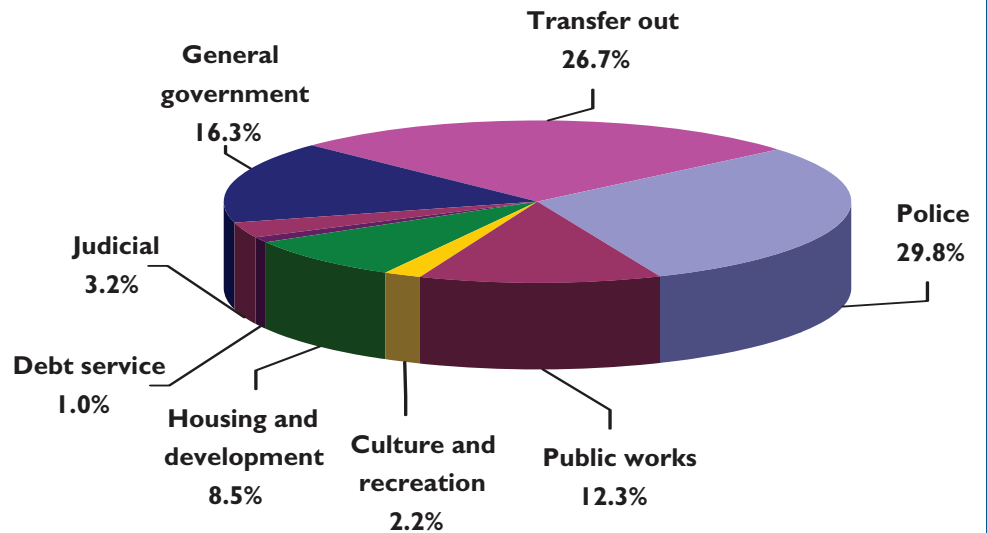
Paved Streets (capital project)
\$100,000

Park Facility (capital project)
\$1,300,000

Tax Allocation District (TAD)
\$57,406

Water Fund
\$150,000

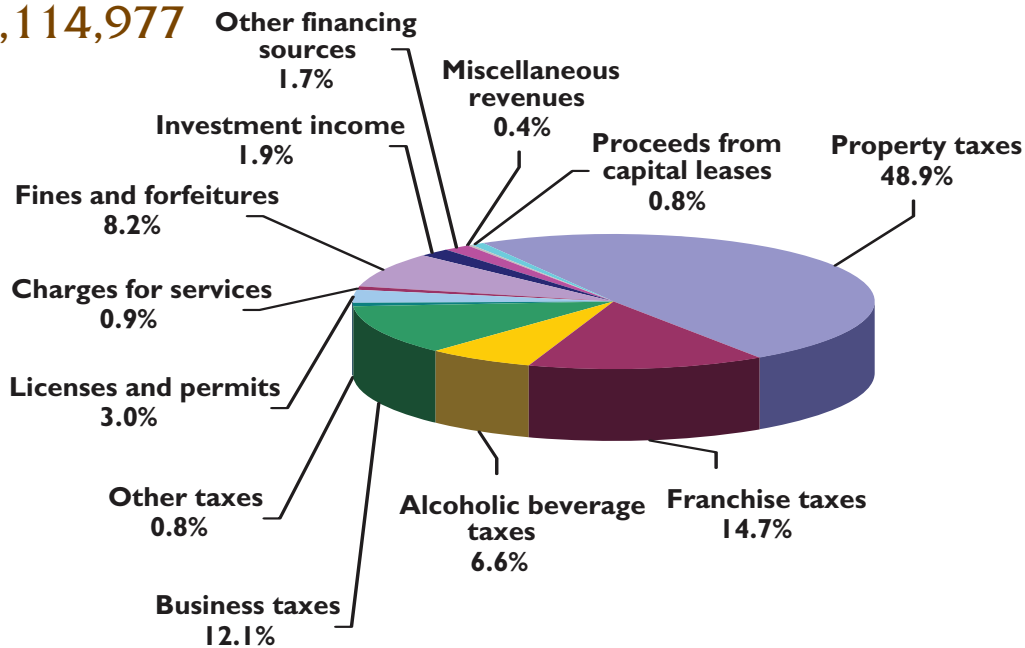
Expenditures \$12,097,822



Data presented is for fiscal year 2009, July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009.

Revenue

\$12,114,977



Suwanee City Council



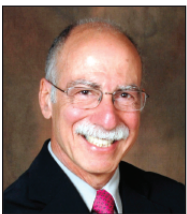
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City Council photos by Julie Perdue



David Douglas

Keep in touch with City Hall

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Up-to-date information and answers
to many frequently asked questions:
www.suwanee.com
www.downtownsuwanee.com

24-hour online citizen request system:
SEE Online
(available through www.suwanee.com)

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