

Suwanee connects

suwanee.com | Summer 2020

INSIDE
this issue...

2

CERTAINLY
uncertain

Mayor
Jimmy Burnette

4



Virtual
Suwanee Fest

10

CITIZENS
OPERATING
BUDGET
FISCAL YEAR 2021
CITY OF SUWANEE, GA

FY2021 Budget and
Millage Rate



CERTAINLY uncertain

By Mayor Jimmy Burnette

Regardless of what you were doing five months ago, your life has likely changed dramatically since COVID-19 arrived in our community. This pandemic forced leaders around the world to make difficult decisions balancing safety, economic success, and other issues at a pace and with a risk level unprecedented in our lives. Suwanee is no exception.



► Fast Action Beginning in March

Since early March, the city has remained in regular, scheduled communication with various officials including Dr. Audrey Arona, director of the Gwinnett Rockdale Newton Health Department, and continues to meet with the county and other state and local leaders on a bi-weekly basis. The extraordinary work of the health department and the coordination that occurred at those meetings helped inform many of the decisions made by the city.

► Modifying City Operations

Senior city staff took action early on to triage operations to ensure the city focused on mission-critical tasks. After careful consideration, the city closed certain facilities to the public and cancelled upcoming park events. While some activities were paused and some activities were stopped, the grass still had to be cut, the water needed to remain on, and public safety remained a priority. We needed to quickly figure out ways to continue business as usual, such as conducting building inspections, processing business license renewals, modifying police protocols, holding public hearings, and handling court activities and fee payments, all while utilizing safe and often virtual methods. Like others, our operations changed to reflect the times.

Knowing the essential value of recreation on physical and mental health. We decided to keep our passive parks and trails open throughout. We temporarily closed playgrounds, but felt that our trails and large open areas provided safe places for the community to gather in open-air environments. With that approach, trash needed to be picked up and bathrooms needed to be cleaned.

► Actions Relating to Non-Essential Businesses

One of the hardest decisions I've been a part of in my nearly 30 years with the city was the decision to limit the activities of non-essential businesses (hair salons, gyms, indoor dining, etc.). Suwanee was one of the first cities in the county to take these actions. While it's hard to be on the front end of such decisions, we felt those actions were important and necessary. Other communities soon followed. Governor Kemp and the State of Georgia subsequently issued multiple executive orders, taking control of business-related closures on a statewide level. As everyone knows, most businesses are able to operate following certain guidelines.

► Supporting Businesses

Recognizing the challenges being faced by our business community, we worked to find ways to support our local businesses, especially those that were being hit the hardest. We postponed business license renewals. We allowed restaurants to sell alcohol to-go. We waived certain rules to encourage and facilitate open-air outdoor patios at restaurants. Staff introduced new communication approaches with businesses to make them aware of fast moving federal financial assistance opportunities. The City Council also took local action by offering a \$500 business license credit to all businesses within the city. [Read more about the business license credit on page 10.] When an idea or suggestion came up to support our businesses, we were all ears.

► Putting Events on Hold

Suwanee is known for its great events season in Town Center Park, and we recognize the importance of these events in building the community. Unfortunately, throughout this time, we've had to make – and are still making – difficult decisions regarding events due to health-related and logistical factors. After considerable thought and discussion, we decided that the city simply cannot hold events to the level of our community's expectations and still keep our citizens safe. We've cancelled most events through September 30 and are currently reviewing events planned for the fall.

► Understanding the Financial Impacts

Moving ahead, we continue to learn and gain new understanding about how this pandemic is going to impact our economy and our financial position. We don't know how long this will last, but because of the disciplined and thoughtful financial strategies adopted by the city over the years, we are prepared for significant financial impacts. We expect revenues to be significantly reduced and have adjusted our spending in our FY2021 budget. We are prepared for impacts beyond just next year as well. The effect on some planned projects remains to be seen. Projects currently under construction will continue, including the court renovation (which is now complete) and projects on Buford Highway. Other planned construction projects will be evaluated over time.

► Great Team

During this uncertain time, one of the comments I can make with absolute certainty is that we have a great team in Suwanee that has consistently provided me and the city council with information necessary to make these hard decisions. Staff has remained committed to continuing to serve our citizens with as little interruption as possible, at times making difficult trade-offs where there isn't a win-win scenario or clear precedent available. When asked to stay home, they've stayed home. When asked to report, they've reported. Making decisions is hard under the best circumstances. Please know that the City of Suwanee has worked hard to ensure the consistent and reliable delivery of city services to the community.

► An Ask

Finally, I ask that you help us. I know that you have heard it all a million times, but please continue to do your part to help manage this pandemic. Wear a mask in public, social distance, wash your hands, and basically follow the advice of medical professionals. If everyone commits to doing their part, we will navigate this storm as quickly as possible. Thank you for your continued support.

LONGTIME CITY COUNCILMAN DAN FOSTER STEPS DOWN

Suwanee City Councilman Dan Foster is stepping down from his post, citing health reasons.

Foster was first elected to Suwanee City Council Post 5 in 2006 after serving on both Suwanee's Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Foster also served on the Suwanee Day planning committee, volunteered with the PlayTown Suwanee community build, served on the Harvest Farm Board, and participated in the Sims Lake Park master planning process.

During Dan's tenure as a councilman, the City of Suwanee ranked on *Money Magazine's* list of best places to live three times; City Hall, Town Center, Harvest Farm, and Sims Lake Park opened; Kiplinger.com ranked Suwanee third among Best Places to Raise Children and *Family Circle* magazine named

Suwanee one of the 10 Best Towns for Families; S&P awarded the city a AAA rating, the highest available; and the city adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, among so many other accomplishments.

"I want to thank Dan for his significant contributions and service to the Suwanee community," said Suwanee Mayor Jimmy Burnette. "We respect Dan's decision and are thinking of him and his family."

At the time this newsletter is being written, it is anticipated that a special election will be called and held for Suwanee City Council Post 5 this November.



SHIPWRECKED



SUWANEE FEST 2020 HAS GONE VIRTUAL!

Socially distant online shopping the entire month of September.
Entertainment, games, and activities September 19 and 20.

WANT TO BE PART OF THE FUN?

Visit SuwanneeFest.com for ways you can participate in our virtual parade and other fun contests.

SET SAIL FROM YOUR SOFA THIS SEPTEMBER!

SUWANEEFEST.COM





Still finding yourself with a lot of free time (if not germs) on your hands? What better time to begin training for the Suwanee Half Marathon on Sunday, February 21, 2021! The half marathon can be the perfect distance: 13.1 miles is long enough to give you something to brag about, but short enough to wrap your brain around (AND finish!).

“Just about anyone can do a half marathon with the proper training. If you can run a 5K now, then you can run a half marathon in eight weeks,” said Jason Miller, Race Director and owner of Performance Race Services. “The key to successful half marathon training is consistently putting in enough weekly mileage to get your body accustomed to running for long periods of time.”

Along with a good training plan, Miller also offers these additional tips for those ready to tackle 13.1 miles:

➤ **Enlist cheerleaders:** Tell as many friends and family as possible that you're training. They'll help you stay motivated and keep a positive attitude. And a little peer pressure never hurt anyone – you don't want to have to explain why you quit training.

➤ **Yes, you're going to need a lot of training:** Train at least 3-4 days per week, with one of those being a longer run. Progressively increase your distances weekly or biweekly, while increasing your long run in half- to full-mile increments.

➤ **Take care of yourself:** Consider this permission to hit the snooze button: Getting plenty of rest is imperative for a distance runner. Full nights of sleep and days off after long runs, not to mention lots of stretching to prevent injury, fueling up on healthy foods, and staying hydrated at ALL times... whether you're running today or not.

➤ **Just keep swimming...er, going:** Nobody is going to remember your finishing time, only that you finished. Walk if you need to; who cares? Just keep going.

“It's all about mind set and finding ways to stay motivated,” said Miller. “Training for an extended period of time, especially for an event that you have never done before, can be mentally and emotionally taxing. Training is hard and monotonous, and the race can be grueling at times. But a half marathon is an incredible – and completely do-able – accomplishment.”

i arted in the car



Need a change of scenery? Take a break from home quarantine, load the family into the old front-wheel drive sleigh, and take a drive through Suwanee to explore the art. The beauty of public art in the age of pandemic is that much can be viewed from the safety of your vehicle (no masks needed!).

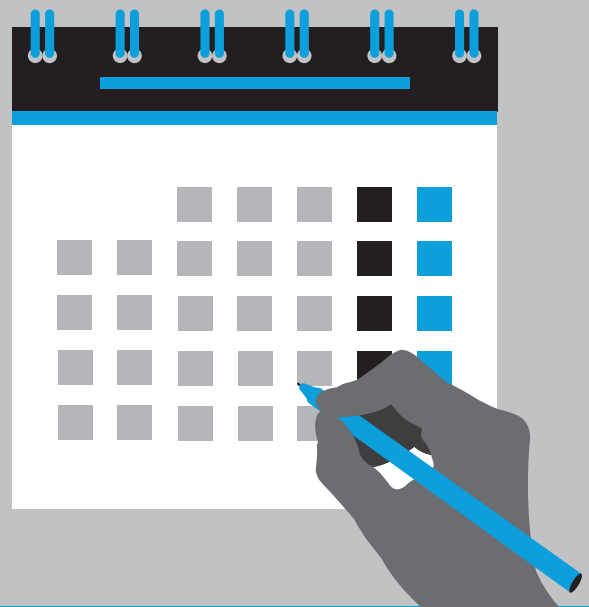
Visit Suwanee.com for an interactive map to all of the city's art pieces that are visible from the road.

CITY OF SUWANEE ANNOUNCES *Additional Changes* TO 2020 EVENT CALENDAR

Anyone who follows Suwanee's events knows that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the city's 2020 event season. Due to a variety of logistical factors, including but not limited to size and nature of certain events, advanced timing required of contracts and commitments, volunteer availability, and overall uncertainty of the future public health environment, all events at Town Center Park have been cancelled through September 30, 2020. These cancellations include the city's annual August Concert & Wing Fest and Suwanee Fest.

"Some of our events have 10,000 and even 50,000 attendees. In addition to health concerns, these types of large events not only require extensive advanced preparations; they also rely on numerous volunteers. With so much uncertainty at this time, we simply couldn't commit to holding such events in ways that would meet our community's expectations," said Suwanee City Manager Marty Allen.

The situation is fluid and still changing; please visit **Suwanee.com** for the most up-to-date information regarding events.



SUWANEE RECEIVES LCI PLANNING GRANT FROM ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION

Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) recently awarded a \$160,000 Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grant to develop a concept for a contiguous pedestrian and bicycle loop around downtown Suwanee. The loop will connect Suwanee neighborhoods to the Suwanee Greenway and downtown Suwanee, as well as connect the downtown to other planned regional trails.



LCI grants are designed to help communities become more vibrant, walkable places that offer increased mobility options, encourage healthy lifestyles, and provide improved access to jobs and services. Upon completion of the study, Suwanee will be eligible to apply for federal transportation funding to help implement the plan.

"For nearly two decades, LCI grants have empowered communities across metro Atlanta to become more livable, walkable, and sustainable," said Sam Shenbaga, Manager, Community Development Group at ARC. "The 2020 LCI grants are sure to spark innovation and creative thinking to foster an improved quality of life for residents."



On November 3, 2020, Suwanee citizens will flock to the polls to vote in a number of federal, state, county, and possibly city elections.

WHERE DO I VOTE?

Suwanee City Hall is a polling site for **CITY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ONLY**; if you are casting your vote in any other election (presidential, U.S. Congressional, State Congressional, Judicial, School Board, County, etc.), you will need to locate your assigned polling site by visiting My Voter Page (www.mvp.sos.ga.gov). County precincts within the municipal limits of Suwanee include:

- 004 – Gwinnett County Public Library, Suwanee
- 007 – Baxley Point
- 026 – Rock Springs UMC
- 097 – Jackson Elementary
- 100 – George Pierce Park
- 106 – Suwanee Service Center
- 131 – Level Creek UMC
- 142 – Suwanee Full Gospel Church
- 155 – Epiphany Lutheran Church



ABSENTEE VOTING

Any registered voter may vote by absentee ballot; you do not need a reason to vote via absentee ballot. In order to obtain an absentee ballot for the City of Suwanee **MUNICIPAL ELECTION ONLY**, application request must be submitted in writing torodonnell@suwanee.com.

Absentee ballots can be mailed to voters through October 30, 2020.



VOTING INFORMATION AND REQUIREMENTS

In order to vote in national, state, and local elections, you must register to vote with the State of Georgia. You should register or re-register if you:

- have moved to Georgia from another state
- are moving from one address in Georgia to another
- are changing your name

To register to vote, you must be:

- a citizen of the United States
- a legal resident of Georgia
- at least 17.5 years (at least 18 to vote)
- not serving a sentence for conviction of a felony involving moral turpitude
- not found mentally incompetent by a judge

Voter registration is available at Suwanee City Hall, public library branches, and the Gwinnett County Elections Office at 455 Grayson Highway, Suite 200, in Lawrenceville. The voter registration form also is available at the Georgia Secretary of State's website. The registration deadline is October 5 for the 2020 elections.



“Due to 2020 being a presidential election year, we expect a large number of voters this November,” said Suwanee Elections Superintendent Elvira Rogers. “We really want to get the word out that voting for the federal, state, and county offices will take place at the assigned county polling locations. Municipal elections – if there is one – is the only election where voting will take place at City Hall.”

tell me something good

SMALL TOWN BIG HEART PROJECT

North Gwinnett High School student Avery Tam launched the Small Town Big Heart Project in an effort to help community members in need. Small Town Big Heart is an organization that aims to alleviate food insecurity in communities. Tam's team led multiple food collection drives, including at the Suwanee Farmers Market, for the North Gwinnett Co-Op. "I was overwhelmed by the community's support; the donations really helped make an impact on our community," said Tam.

SPRING BREAK TEES YIELD \$1,250 FOR NORTH GWINNETT CO-OP

You wanted them, so we made them! Our Spring Break 2020 design was such a hit online that the City of Suwanee produced t-shirts, tank tops, and crop tops with the design to raise money for the North Gwinnett Co-Op. After just a week of sales, the co-op received a check for \$1,250 to support their efforts during the pandemic!

The classic airbrushed spring break design was art directed by City of Suwanee staff and executed by Veugeler Design Group. Local t-shirt printer EM Local volunteered to produce the shirt at cost and donate all profits to support the good works of the co-op.





Geekspace Gwinnett

Create · Innovate · Inspire

GEEKSPACE GWINNETT MAKES PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR LOCAL HEALTHCARE WORKERS

The makers at Geekspace Gwinnett have been creating protective face shields and masks for brave healthcare workers. At the time of printing, the non-profit makerspace had made over 2,000 shields for local physician offices, urgent care facilities, and Gwinnett Medical Center. Geekspace members have donated their time and talent; the organization has received \$4,000 in donations for materials, as well as plastic sheeting from The Coca-Cola Co.

"There is a greater need for shields than we could ever hope to fulfill," said a Geekspace representative. "We will continue this effort for as long as needed and materials allow. With more funding, we can increase production and purchase materials to make many more shields and supply more locations."

Visit Geekspace Gwinnett's Facebook page to learn more about making a financial contribution to this project.



SUMMER PORCH JAM POSTER WINS DESIGN CONTEST

Sunshine Artist magazine recently named the Suwanee Summer Porch Jam poster winner of the Best Layout category in its annual poster competition.

"The aim of the poster is that it reflects the very essence of the event – the longest day of light hours of the year, hot summer days in the south, hanging out on a porch listening to music and enjoying a drink with friends," said City of Suwanee Public Information Officer Abby Wilkerson.

The pale, sun-drenched yellow evokes memories of cold lemonade on a wraparound porch, with the sky blue accent punctuating a perfect summer day. The organic, casual nature of Summer Porch Jam called for simplicity in both content and typography; the clean type and layout was influenced by a collection of vintage and retro music posters. The 12"x12" square shape of the poster reflects a classic vinyl album cover, and a Woodstock-esque guitar sets the tone for this laid back, come-as-you-are event.

The brainstorm and art direction for the poster was handled in-house. Veugeler Design Group executed the design.

SUWANEE MILLAGE RATE REMAINS AT 4.93, SAME AS PAST EIGHT YEARS

After analyzing the 2020 tax consolidation information provided by Gwinnett County, the City of Suwanee is proposing that the millage rate remain at 4.93 mills, the same rate adopted by the city the past eight years.

The City of Suwanee began the new fiscal year July 1 with a \$13.4 million balanced operating budget. This year's budget represents a 3.3% decrease in operating expenditures as compared to FY 2020.

Suwanee's \$13,438,080 FY2021 budget includes:

- 107 full-time and 16 part-time positions
- \$40,000 cyber security program
- \$30,000 new public works equipment
- \$55,000 replacement police vehicle
- \$37,000 new police equipment
- \$97,000 police dispatch software upgrades
- \$10,000 election equipment

"Development of the FY2021 budget occurred as the financial realities of COVID-19 began to emerge. At this time, we do not know the full extent the pandemic will have on our revenues and expenses. As such, we took a very conservative financial approach for the FY2021 budget," said Amie Sakmar, City of Suwanee Financial Services Director.

Due to the pandemic, all revenue projections were reduced to recession activity performance using 2008-2012 data.

The FY2021 budget is based upon the assumed millage rate of 4.93 mills. The millage rate for FY2021 will be set at the August 25 City Council meeting after public hearings at City Hall on August 13 at 5:30 pm and August 25 at 12:00 pm and 6:30 pm.

For more information regarding the City of Suwanee's FY2021 budget, please visit Suwanee.com and click on the Open Budget icon on the homepage.

CITY ANNOUNCES 2020-21 BUSINESS LICENSE TAX CREDIT

On Thursday, May 14, 2020, the Suwanee City Council voted to approve a business license tax credit in an effort to offset hardships created by COVID-19.

Suwanee's program provides up to \$500 dollars in business license tax credits that can be applied to any City of Suwanee business for either the 2020 or the 2021 business license. This program also applies to new business that open thru March 2021.

"With citizens practicing social distancing and other restrictions, an enormous economic strain has been placed on our local businesses," said Suwanee Mayor Jimmy Burnette. "The city council developed this program in hopes of helping businesses make it through these increasing difficult times." In addition to the tax credit, the City of Suwanee

also extended its business license deadline from the original date of March 31, 2020 to May 29, 2020.

"We've chosen to undertake this tax credit in order to respond to the economic challenges many are currently facing," said Marty Allen, Suwanee City Manager. "We greatly value our business community and want to support their success. The city will continue to evaluate our options as the situation evolves."

For more information regarding the City of Suwanee Business License Tax Credit, please contact Business Services Director Jessica Roth at 770-945-8996 or jroth@suwanee.com.

CITY EARNS 2020 NATIONAL MAIN STREET ACCREDITATION

The City of Suwanee has been designated as a 2020 Accredited Main Street America program, a status which the city has held since 2000. Accredited status is Main Street America's top tier of recognition and signifies a demonstrated commitment to comprehensive commercial district revitalization, and proven track record of successfully applying the Main Street Approach.

"Accredited Main Street programs have proven to be powerful engines for revitalization by sparking impressive economic returns and preserving the character of their communities," said Patrice Frey, President & CEO of the National Main Street Center.

Evaluation criteria for accreditation defines the communities that are building comprehensive and sustainable revitalization efforts and include standards such as fostering strong public-private partnerships, documenting programmatic progress, and actively preserving historic buildings.

"Our robust events schedule, good mix of residential and commercial development, great marketing, and general activity of our citizens and visitors contribute to this continued accreditation," said Suwanee Assistant City Manager Denise Brinson. "Town Center and Old Town have their distinct personalities, but together create a downtown environment that is uniquely Suwanee."



Welcome - TO - CITY HALL

The Suwanee Municipal Court welcomed **Bill Dodd** as the newest bailiff. Bill is no stranger to the court system, having spent over 14 years as vice president at Professional Probation Services. Prior, Bill served as Chief Probation Officer for the Gwinnett Judicial Circuit for 18 years.

A member of The Boomerang Club, the Public Works department welcome facilities technician **Jeremy Fryar** back to the City of Suwanee! Fryar, his wife, and three children call Buford home, and he can be found playing softball, fishing, landscaping, and woodworking when not on the job.

Suwanee resident **Angie Kubik** has joined City Hall as our new Farmers Market Manager. When she's not at the Farmers Market on Saturday mornings, Angie enjoys working out, going on family adventures, and being a taxi driver to her three children.

Congratulations

to Suwanee Police Explorer **Nayeli Hernandez**, who received the Learning for Life Leadership Award presented by Boy Scouts of America! This award is a distinguished honor for those who have shown exceptional leadership in Exploring or Learning for Life programs. She has been a member of the Suwanee Police Explorer program since 2016 and was appointed Post Lieutenant in January 2019. Nayeli will also be recognized at the 2020 Winterfest award ceremony in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

UPCOMING EVENTS

official newsletter of the city of suwanee, georgia

AUGUST 20

1	Farmers Market	8:00 am
8	Farmers Market	8:00 am
12	Public Art Commission	6:00 pm
13	FY2021 Millage Rate Public Hearing	5:30 pm
15	Farmers Market	8:00 am
18	Downtown Development Authority	7:30 am
22	Farmers Market	8:00 am
25	FY2021 Millage Rate Public Hearing	12:00 pm
25	FY2021 Millage Rate Public Hearing	6:30 pm
25	City Council Meeting	6:30 pm
29	Farmers Market	8:00 am

SEPTEMBER 20

1	Planning Commission	6:30 pm
5	Farmers Market	8:00 am
7	City Hall	CLOSED
9	Public Art Commission	6:00 pm
10	City Council Workshop	5:30 pm
12	Farmers Market	8:00 am
15	Downtown Development Authority	7:30 am
15	Zoning Board of Appeals	6:30 pm
19	Farmers Market	8:00 am
22	City Council Meeting	6:30 pm
26	Farmers Market	8:00 am

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:



MAYOR Jimmy Burnette 770/868-7115
COUNCIL Dan Foster 678/404-9641
 Heather Hall 410/979-7905
 Beth Hilscher 678/546-3388
 Linnea Miller 678/592-4150
 Larry Pettiford 678/464-3651

CITY MANAGER Marty Allen 770/945-8996
POLICE CHIEF Mike Jones 770/945-8995
EDITOR Abby Wilkerson 770/945-3386

Unless otherwise noted, City of Suwanee public meetings are at City Hall, 330 Town Center Avenue. Dates subject to change; check suwanee.com for updates.

**CITY OF
SUWANEE,
GEORGIA**