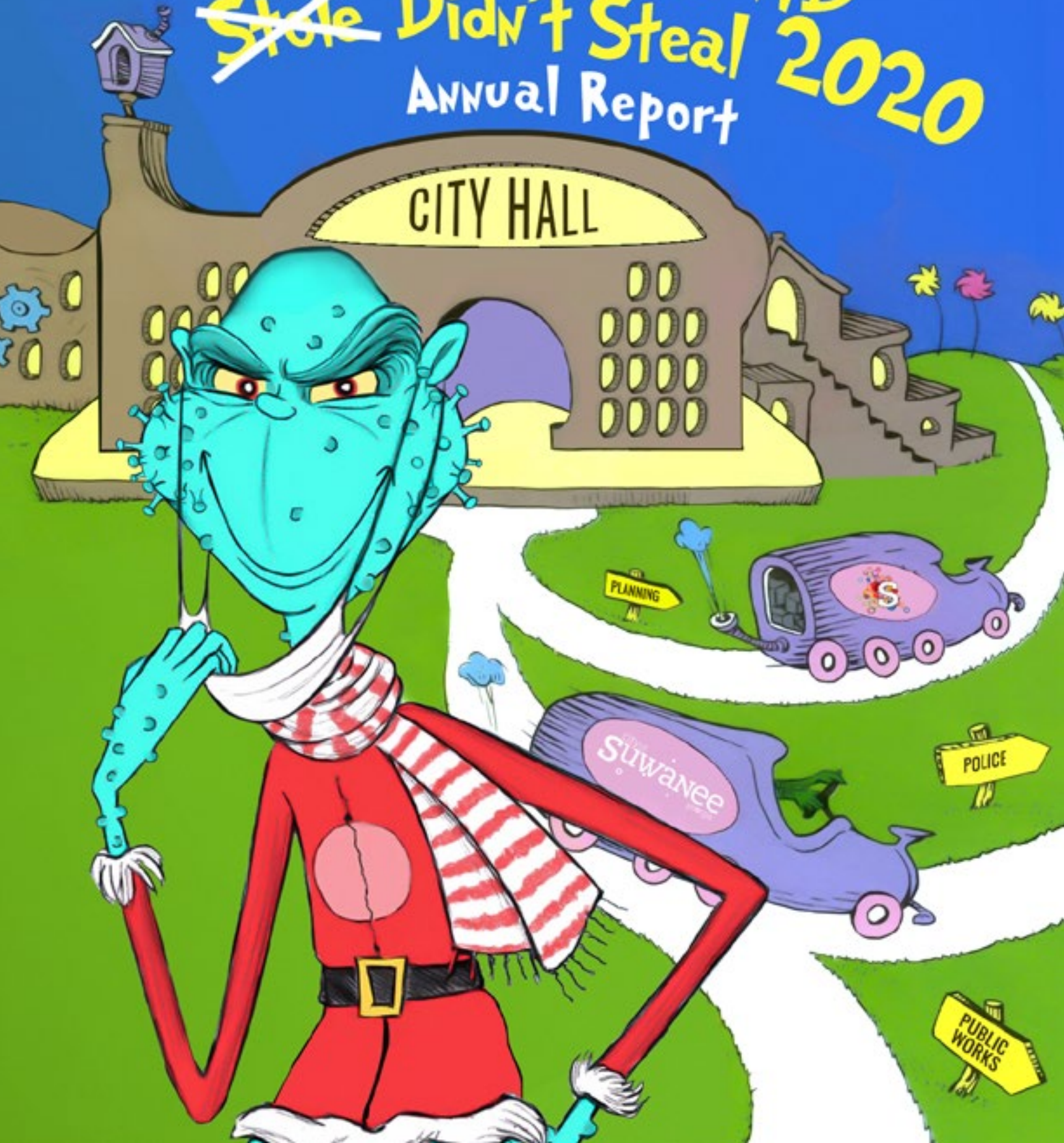


City of Suwanee, GA

# ~~Stole~~ How The COVID Didn't Steal 2020 Annual Report



## Message from the Mayor

The last year was undoubtedly the most difficult that I can remember, both personally and as a public servant. Regardless of what you were doing 12 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 was no exception.

Much like 2020, this Annual Report looks a little different than it has in the past. We borrowed a concept or two from Doctor Seuss in an effort to create an informative, yet light-hearted look at a challenging year. We mean in no way to downplay the difficulties that anyone has faced; we only hope to bring a little levity via a few happy rhymes.

From healthcare to first responders, teachers to grocery store workers, public works to court staff, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the essential workers who went above and beyond this year. Unlike the Grinch, COVID-19 has no saving qualities, and this is not a story of redemption. Rather, it is a testament to the resiliency of the people of Suwanee.

Sincerely,  
**JIMMY Burnette**



# During 2020

Every Suwaneetian  
Living in Suwanee  
Liked living in Suwanee a lot...

But the COVID,  
Who hated everything,  
did NOT!



The COVID hated hugging! And gathering together!  
It hated full parks in the beautiful spring weather.

The COVID even hated the Suwanee events season.  
Now, please don't ask why – no one knows quite the reason.



It could be because it couldn't run a **half marathon** or even **5K**.

It could be, perhaps, that the Farmers Market didn't make its day.

But I think that the most likely reason primarily Is it hated happiness, and people acting merrily.

But,  
Whatever the reason  
With discord superfluous  
It decided in the winter of 2020  
that what it really hated was *all of us*.

Viewing happy Suwanee, with a sour, mean frown  
A look of disdain at the **award-winning town**.  
For it knew every Suwaneetian in Suwanee, G-A  
Would soon cause it dismay.

“They're all so very cheerful!”  
it snarled with a sneer.  
“And it won't be long until spring is here.”  
Then it growled, with fingers nervously  
drumming,  
“I MUST find some way to stop  
happiness from coming!”

For,  
In the spring, it knew...

**In-person events hosted in 2020**,  
in spite of the COVID's best efforts:

- Feb. 9 | 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Suwanee Half Marathon & Old Town 5K
  - Feb. 15 | Suwanee Sweetheart Sprint 5K
  - Oct. 18 | Run Away from 2020 5K
  - Oct. 25 | Top This!
  - Dec. 4 | Santapalooza: The Naughty or Nice Tour
  - Dec. 5 | Run Run Rudolph 5k
- ...as well as **41 Farmers Markets**.



**Program of the Year** by Georgia Municipal Court Clerks Association - Suwanee Municipal Court

**Certificate of Distinction Award** for Superior Performance Management by the International City/County Management Association - 11th consecutive year

**Distinguished Budget Presentation Award** with Special Recognition

**Event Planner of the Year** by the Southeast Festivals & Events Association - Amy Doherty

**Southeast Festivals & Events Association Kaleidoscope Awards:**

- **Best Vendor, Gold** - Performance Race Services for Suwanee Half Marathon
- **Best Volunteer, Silver** - Kate Fanale, Suwanee Fest
- **Best Poster, Silver** - Suwanee Fest
- **Best Creative Idea, Silver** - Parker's Passport
- **Best Event within an Event, Bronze** - lantern classes for Glow in the Park



**Best Poster Layout** by Sunshine Artists - Summer Porch Jam

**American Heart Association Workplace Health Award**, Silver

**Named Tree City USA**  
31<sup>st</sup> consecutive year

**2020 National Main Street Accreditation**



...All the Suwanee girls and guys  
The old and the young, both large and pint-size  
Would be out and about  
Shopping, eating, playing, and just hanging out.

They would have picnics in the **park** each day  
They'd run and scream in the fountain as they play.  
They'd enjoy disc golf and kick a soccer ball  
They'd lounge around doing nothing particular at all.

And THEN  
They'd do something  
The COVID liked least of all!  
Every Suwaneetian in Suwanee in the early fall  
Would gather in Town Center  
(a place COVID did detest)  
For a weekend of community celebration  
– that wretched Suwanee Fest!

And the more the COVID thought of  
the annual fling,  
The more the COVID thought,  
“I must stop this whole thing!  
Why, for over thirty years I've put up  
with it now!  
I MUST stop Suwanee Fest from coming!

**BUT HOW?**

**Then it got an idea!**

**New city lamppost banners** were designed and installed throughout Town Center, Old Town, and the Suwanee Gateway areas.

The city broke ground on the **renovation of Station Park** in October.



An awful idea!  
**THE COVID GOT A  
WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA!**

“I know *just* what to do; I’ll throw them  
a real curve ball.  
I’ll make them so unhappy, and life  
simply awful for *them all*.”

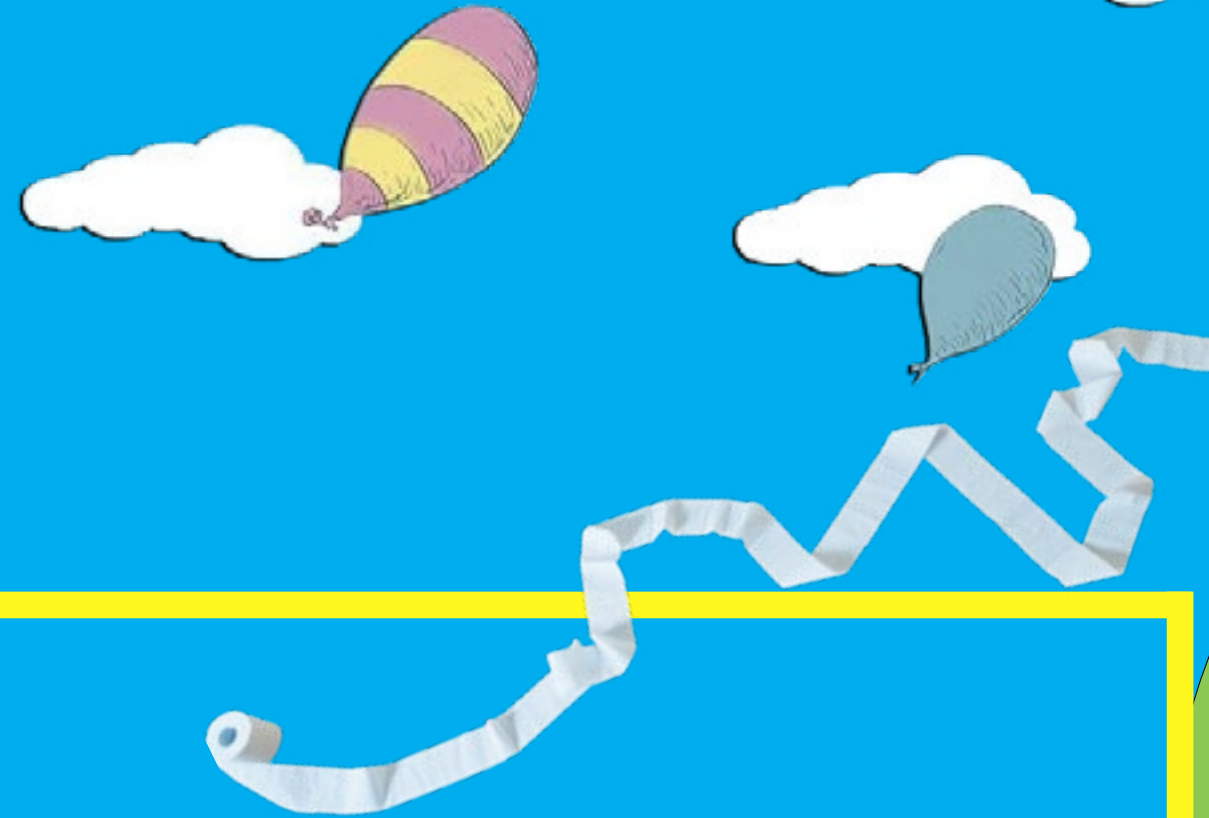
I’ll **close down public spaces,**  
I’ll even close the schools!  
They’ll be forced to stay at home,  
those merry old fools.

They’ll buy all the toilet paper before  
they can calm down.  
Social distancing, masks, and lockdowns  
will cripple their beloved town.

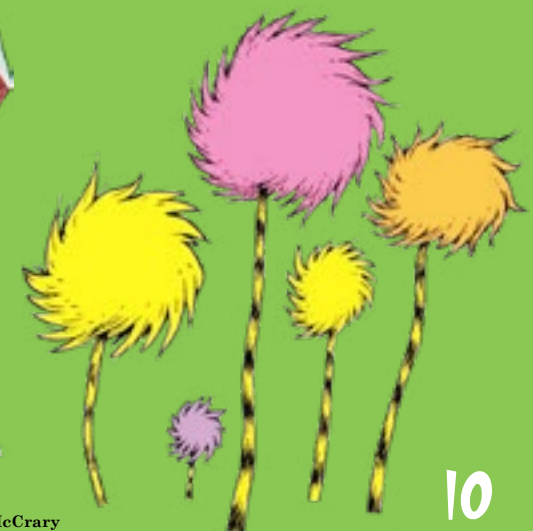
I will not have to see their happy grins  
I will not have to see their  
dimpled chins.

I will not see a single nose  
I will not see a lip exposed!

Oh the places they won’t go  
And the merriment they  
won’t show!”



In mid-March, Suwanee was one of **the first cities in Gwinnett County** to take action to limit the activities of non-essential businesses. Though being on the front end of such decisions was difficult, the City Council and staff felt those actions were **important and necessary at the time**. 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.



# And so the COVID devised its devious plan

To steal happiness and joy from every woman and each man.

“Pooh-pooh to Suwanee!” it was grinch-ish-ly humming.

“They’re realizing now that **no event season** is coming!

They’re starting to understand, and I know just what they’ll do  
They’ll turn on each other, with their attitudes so blue.

They’ll question mask-wearing and where their friends have been,  
They’ll be so busy hating that they’ll never gather again!”



Suwanee is known for its great event season in Town Center Park, and these events play an important role in **building community**. After considerable thought and discussion – due to health-related and logistical factors – it was decided that the city simply **could not hold events** to the level of the community’s expectations and still keep citizens safe. Nearly all in-person events were cancelled from March 14 through the rest of 2020.

The lone exception was the **open air Farmers Market**. By allowing extra spacing between farmers and strongly suggesting **masks and social distancing**, the outdoor market became a **safe alternative** to indoor shopping.



“That’s a sound,” grinned the COVID,  
 “That I simply MUST hear!”  
 So it paused, and put a hand to its ear.

But the sound wasn’t angry; in fact, they  
 sounded resolute.  
 The Suwaneetians were clever and **capable**  
 (and really quite astute).

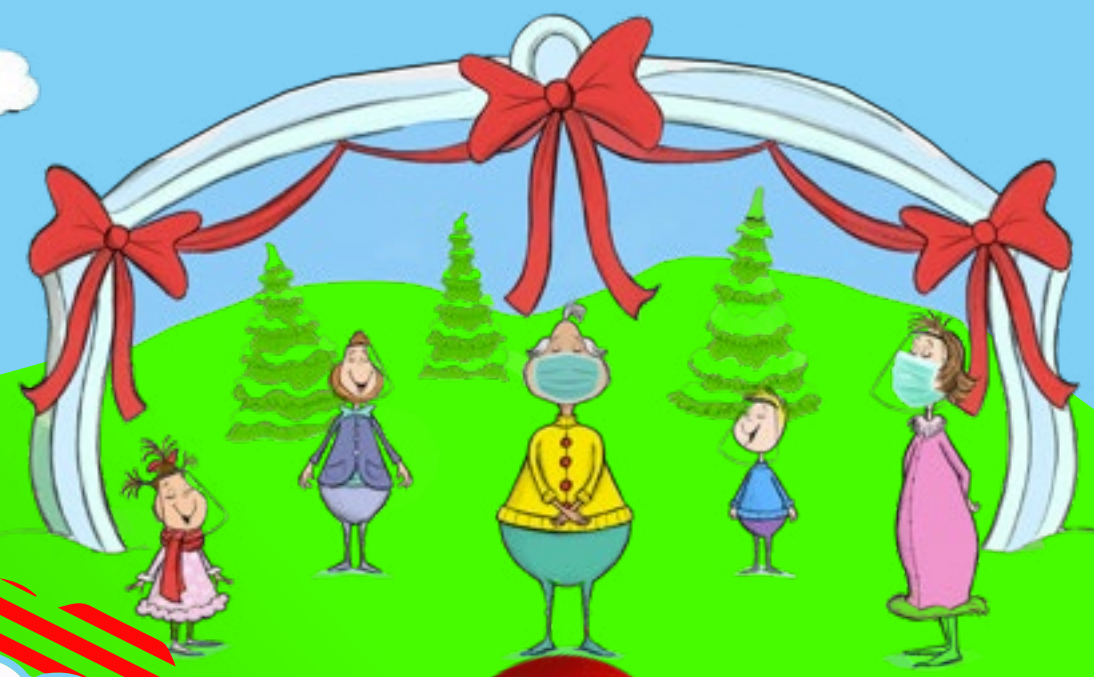
“We’re tough and strong-willed, and  
 with lots of grit and nerve  
 We’ll get through this together, we’ll  
 flatten the curve.

We will wear our **masks** here or there  
 We will wear our **masks** everywhere.

We’ll stay home when we’re asked  
 and really wash our hands  
 Stay six feet apart and  
 cooperate with bans.”

The Suwaneetians came together;  
 they did not come undone.

They worked as a **community** and figured out  
 how to get things done.



City Hall hosted two  
**blood drives** for staff,  
 collecting from  
 65 donors.



The city designed and  
 produced **5,000 masks**  
 featuring the bubble  
 design, which were  
**delivered to educators  
 and front-line workers,**  
 and given away  
 to citizens.



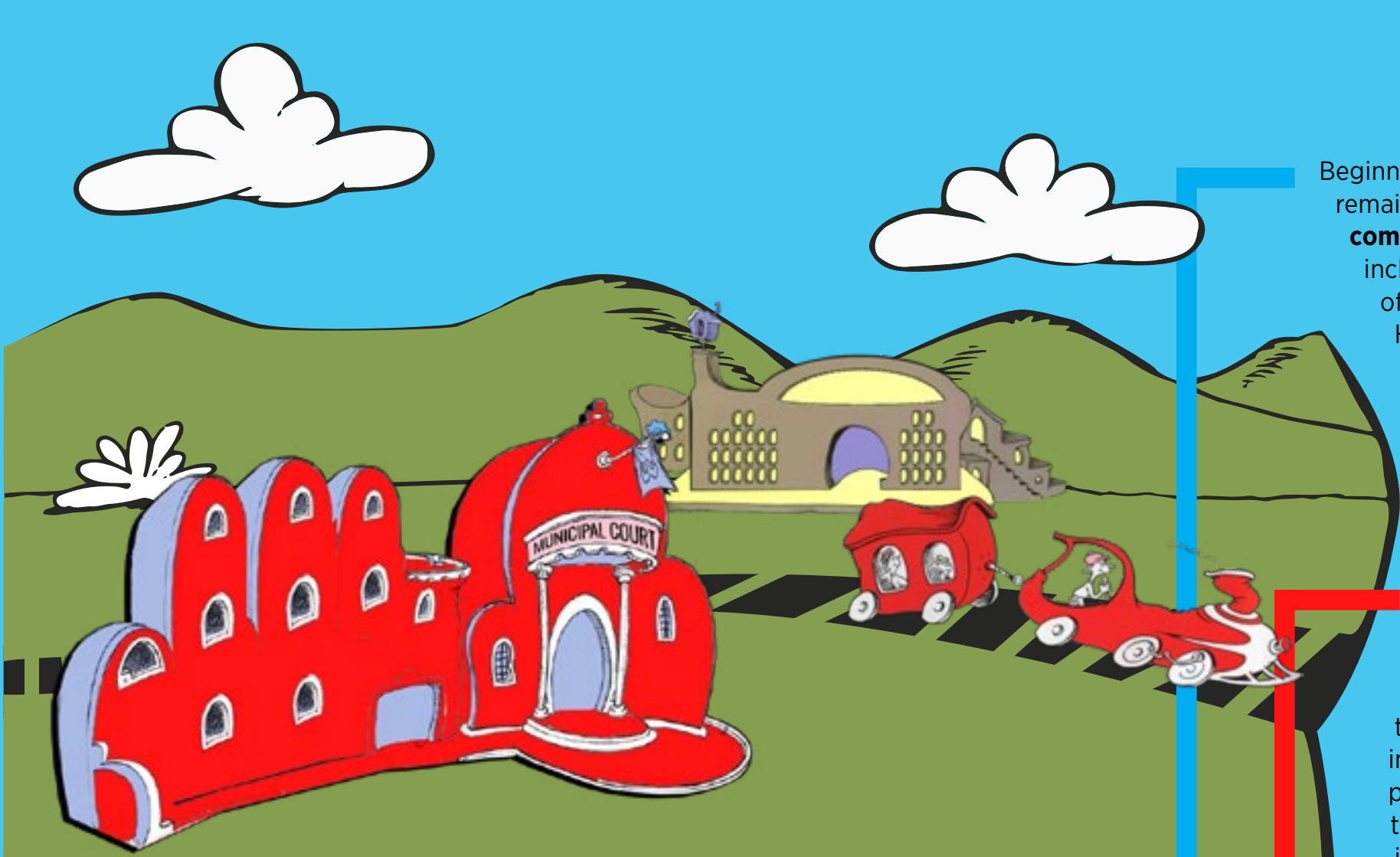
**HEROES  
 WORK HERE**

A thank you video was produced  
 and distributed via social media,  
 recognizing Suwanee’s invaluable  
 essential workers who kept Suwanee  
 up-and-running during the pandemic,  
 such as **first responders,  
 healthcare, teachers,  
 daycares, grocery stores,  
 and senior facilities.**



**SCAN TO  
 WATCH  
 THE FULL  
 STORY**





City Hall met with other jurisdictions and Dr. Arona to discuss how to **mitigate** the terrible Corona.

License renewals went **digital** and building inspections streamlined **Court** activities and payments were similarly aligned.

Beginning in early March, the city remained in **regular, scheduled communication** with various officials including Dr. Audrey Arona, Director of the Gwinnett Rockdale Newton Health Department, and met with the county and other state and local leaders on a bi-weekly basis. Dr. Arona's office was responsible for leading the local response to the pandemic.

The city knew that the technology existed to take **business licensing and permitting online**, but previously lacked the time to integrate a new process into their existing systems. The pandemic not only demanded that the processes be virtual, but it also freed up the necessary time to implement. Builders and contractors are now submitting forms digitally almost exclusively, **increasing efficiency overall**.

Senior city staff took action early on to triage operations to ensure the city focused on mission-critical tasks. In addition to **prioritizing public safety and public works**, staff quickly developed **innovative** ways to continue business as usual, such as conducting building inspections, processing business license renewals, holding meetings, and handling court activities and fee payments, all while utilizing **safe and often virtual methods**.

The City of Suwanee completed **renovations** to the nearly 60-year-old **municipal court building**, including a three-story addition of approximately 8,600 square feet to the existing 3,200 square foot building. The building - which was Suwanee's original city hall - received an expanded lobby to accommodate court session crowds, doubled court clerk work space, and added new space for the police department's Special Enforcement Unit.

Included in the renovations were **virtual queuing** and **mobile ticketing systems**, which allowed customers to check-in remotely and wait in their vehicles until contacted by their mobile devices. A dashboard provides real time insights that lead to instant solutions, such as opening another check-in window when the number of customers exceeds a certain limit. Additionally, the system allows employees to **work remotely** with virtual check-in and queuing.

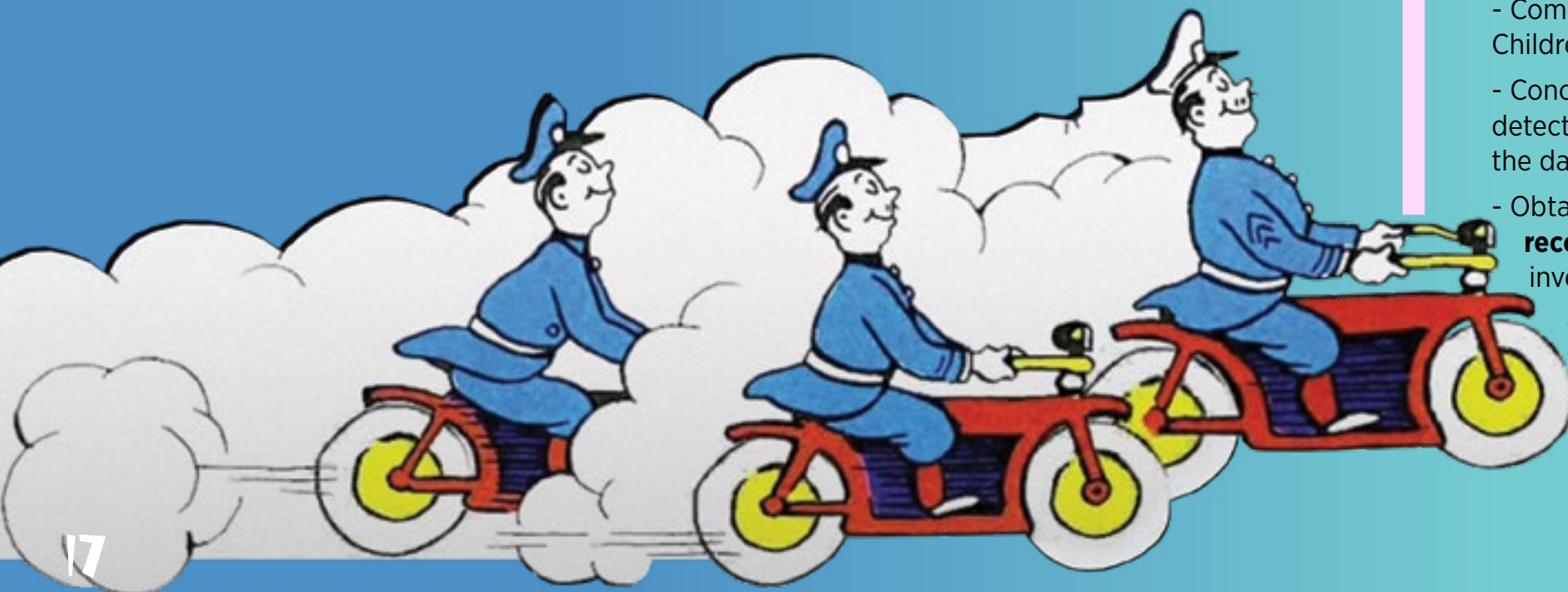


**Public works** is essential (a conclusion foregone)

They made sure the grass was still cut and the water was still on.

Similarly, the **police** still had to respond, So they modified protocols, and went above and beyond.

They escorted graduation and teacher parades without fail  
And celebrated kids' birthdays with drive-bys and sirens that wail.



In addition to regular city maintenance projects, public works:

- Completed Davis Street **waterline installation**
- Began Main Street **drainage improvements** and the addition of **new parking spaces**
- Made HVAC improvements to City Hall and the municipal court buildings
- Improved access control to City Hall

...all while working in smaller crews to allow for social distancing.

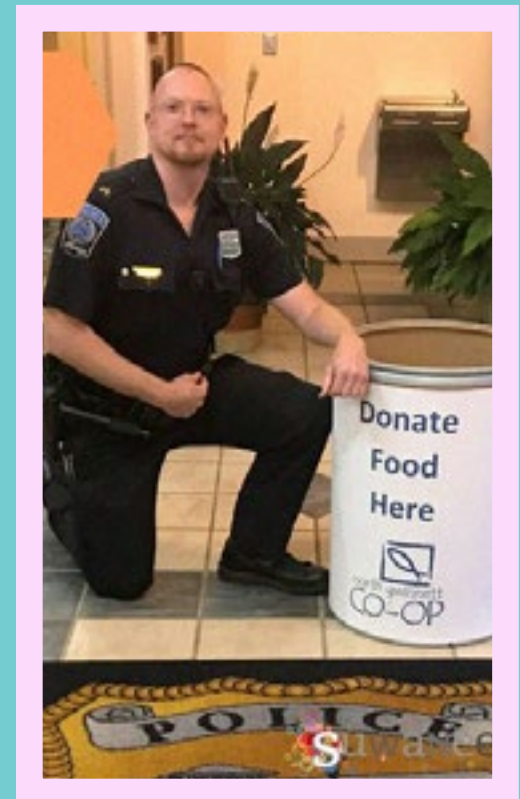
Throughout the pandemic and resulting stay-at-home orders, the Suwanee Police continued to report for duty. Approaches and priorities were modified, but the city continued to be served without interruption.

In 2020, the Suwanee police department partnered with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to collect unneeded medicines and **safely dispose of pharmaceuticals** containing controlled substances, as well as other medicines.

Additionally, the police:

- Obtained **Automated Electronic Defibrillators** for every sergeant and corporal in uniform patrol
- Completed two Internet Crimes Against Children operations
- Concluded **specialized training** for detectives in ICAC peer-to-peer sharing, the dark web, and cryptocurrency
- Obtained artificial intelligence **facial recognition software** to assist criminal investigations and suspect identification
- Successfully completed **CALEA accreditation** and state certification

The Suwanee Police also held **monthly food drives** on behalf of the North Gwinnett Co-Op.



Public meetings were still held regularly (though not in the same room)  
Both council and staff mastered **Slack and Zoom.**

Council voted to give local businesses that were hard hit **Business and alcohol tax license credits** to ease the strain a bit.

**Remote working and communication tools** had been adopted by the city prior to the pandemic to promote flexibility, but not until staff was working exclusively from home was it fully embraced. A digital platform was utilized for project communication, collaboration, and collection, allowing for the necessary over-communication that remote work often requires.

Suwanee voters elected Pete Charpentier to fill **City Council Post 5**, which was vacated by Dan Foster in the summer for health reasons. This was a special election to fill an unexpired term; 869 citizens voted in this socially-distanced election.

Recognizing the challenges being faced by our business community, the city worked to find ways to offer support, especially to those being hit the hardest. The City Council offered a **\$500 business license credit** to all businesses within the city, as well as **up to \$6,000 in alcohol license tax credits** for restaurants.



Staff introduced new communication approaches with businesses to make them aware of fast moving federal financial assistance opportunities. Business license renewals were postponed; restaurants were permitted to **sell alcohol to-go**; certain rules were waived to encourage and facilitate **open-air outdoor patios** at restaurants.



**Parks** were kept open to give folks a place to retreat.

A driving tour was created of **art** to be viewed from the street.

They added outdoor seating to the parks, complete with big tents  
And hosted Porch Jam and Suwanee Fest online and other cool events!

Suwaneeetians painted cheerful artwork on new tables in the park  
All within their family groups and staying six feet apart.

Suwanee also continued to **grow and to thrive**  
There were **260 building permits issued!**  
And lots of smooth new streets to drive.



Explore Gwinnett awarded the Public Arts Commission a **Gwinnett Creativity Fund project grant**, totaling \$10,000, to create a public art mural on a brick retaining wall at the intersection of Buford Highway and Town Center Avenue.

Muralist Kim Pitts donated 'Suwanee Rocks' to the city's permanent art collection. **The mural** – depicting legendary musicians – was installed in October on the back of the Town Center stage.

The Public Arts Commission also added a **colorful new crosswalk** to Town Center, and had fun creating masks for several pieces of art.

The Downtown Development Authority signed leases for and helped open **Living Well Farmers Market** and **Bottles & Bones** in the Siena mixed-use development, and purchased **more commercial space** in Solis Phase II.

#### **The planning & inspections department**

- Managed construction of:
  - Eight new neighborhoods
  - Two mixed-use projects
  - Eight commercial projects
  - One new pocket park
- Created 309 new residential lots
- Oversaw:
  - Three rezoning cases
  - One special use permit
  - One variance
  - Two administrative variances
- Performed 6,492 inspections and 302 erosion control inspections
- Addressed 92 code enforcement issues
- Worked with the US Census Bureau
- Updated the zoning ordinance and GIS dataset
- Created an online interactive city limits map

Knowing the essential value of recreation on physical and mental health, the city decided to **keep parks and trails open** throughout the quarantine as safe places for the community to enjoy open-air environments. Playgrounds were temporarily closed. **Public works** once again proved themselves to be essential workers, keeping these places clean for all to enjoy.



And despite a year filled with economic unknowns  
The city maintained the strong financial status,  
for which it is well-known.

Suwanee's **millage rate** remains steady – music to our ears!  
Staying the same or less for the past seventeen years.

For seven years consecutive, the city has maintained a **AAA bond rating**  
Allowing for borrowing at great rates and smooth operating.

For all this and more, the financial department's prowess and cunning  
Earned the city the ICMA Certificate of Distinction Award for 11 years running!

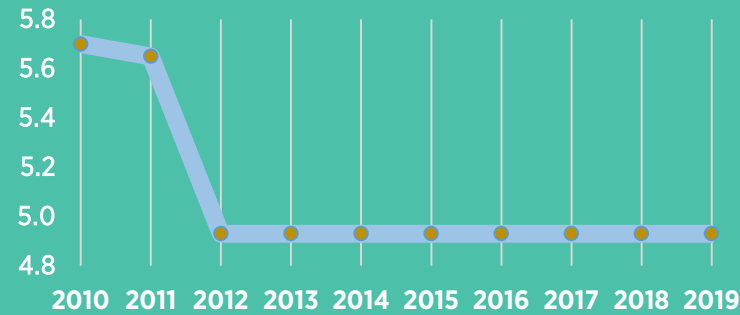


### BUDGET

The City of Suwanee began fiscal year 2020 with a \$13.8 million balanced operating budget. The final amended operating budget of \$13.9 million, amounted to an overall increase of \$124,000, less than 1%. Suwanee's adopted fiscal year 2021 operating budget of \$13.4 million is a decrease of (\$452,500) or -3.3% from the final amended 2020 budget. The decrease in the fiscal year 2021 adopted budget is a reflection of the unknown with the economic slowdown and the global pandemic.

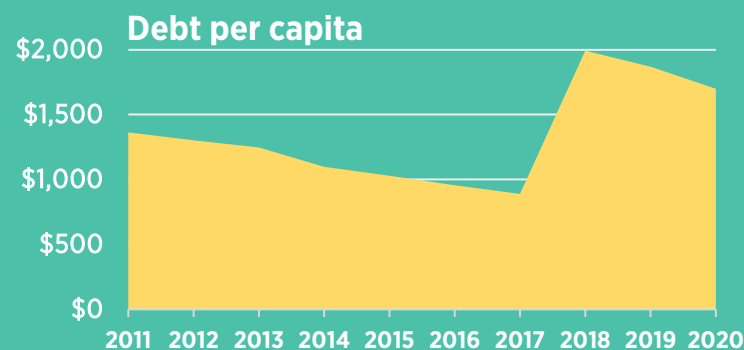
### MILLAGE RATE

At 4.93 mills, Suwanee's millage rate has stayed the same or has been reduced for the past seventeen years.



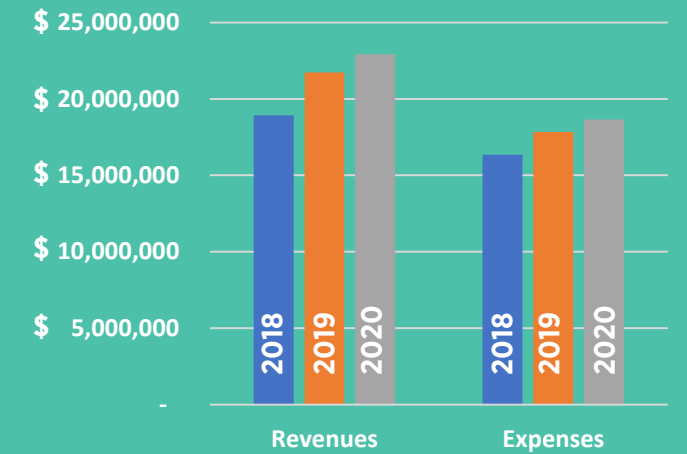
### DEBT SERVICE

At the end of fiscal year 2020, Suwanee's total debt outstanding was \$35.1 million. This debt is comprised of \$8.7 million general obligation debt (backed by the full faith and credit of the city) and \$26.4 million revenue bonds (obligated through an intergovernmental agreement with the Urban Redevelopment Agency). Suwanee has a AAA long term bond rating from Standard & Poor's Global Ratings. This is the highest rating attainable, which allows the city to borrow at the best rates possible.



### REVENUES & EXPENSES

Revenues are dollars received, and expenses are the costs associated with providing services.

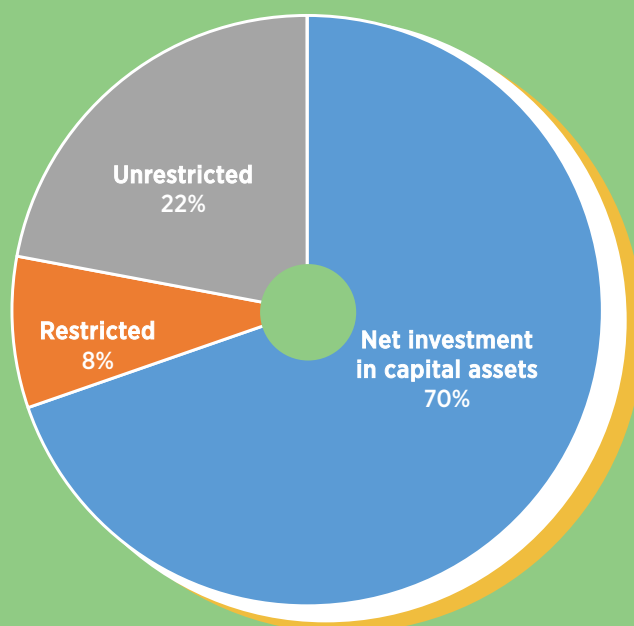


The three year history above shows that revenues have increased by \$4.0 million from fiscal year 2018 to 2020. The majority of the difference is due to increases in donated assets from developers (\$1.7 million), property tax growth (\$1.1 million), growth in Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) revenues (\$326,000), and a one-time payment of \$200,000 from Gwinnett County for service delivery. Donated assets from developers includes sidewalks, streets, curbing, street lighting, and storm drainage systems.

The three year history also demonstrates that expenses have increased at a lower rate as compared to revenues for the same time period. Expenses increased by \$2.3 million from 2018 to 2020. The majority of the increase is related to expenses in Public Works (\$2.2 million). These expenses include repairs and maintenance of the city's road and storm water systems along with increasing depreciation related to these types of assets.

## WHAT THE CITY OWES & OWNS

Net position summarizes everything the city owes and owns; it provides a snapshot of the city's financial health at the end of the fiscal year.



The largest portion of Suwanee's net position (70%) represents capital assets such as land, buildings, equipment, and infrastructure (roads, bridges, and other immovable assets). The city uses these capital assets to provide services to citizens. Investment in capital assets are reported net, minus any related debt. Resources needed to repay any debt must be provided from other resources, since capital assets themselves cannot be used to liquidate debt.

### • NET INVESTMENT IN CAPITAL ASSETS

The difference between the amounts paid for capital assets and any debt used to acquire those assets, such as loans or mortgages.

### • RESTRICTED

Funds that are not available for general use by the city because they must be used for a specific purpose or projects as required by law or regulations. Examples include SPLOST funds set aside for capital projects, unspent grant funds, and resources collected for future debt payments.

### • UNRESTRICTED

The remaining balance that has not been reported in any other classification.

## WHERE DID THE MONEY COME FROM?

Total revenues for fiscal year 2020 were \$22.7 million, of which 31% was from property taxes. Other main revenue sources include capital grants and contributions (24%) which include revenues received from SPLOST and donated infrastructure from developers, charge for services (12%), and franchise fee (8%).

### PROPERTY TAXES

- Residential Property Taxes 15.5%
- Commercial Property Taxes 15.5%

### GRANTS

Includes operating and capital grants. Operating grants are used for day-to-day operations of the city. Capital grants are used for capital purposes, such as building roads, sidewalks, facilities, etc.

### CHARGES FOR SERVICES

Fees collected for services rendered, such as building inspection permits, water usage fees, park rental fees, etc.

### FRANCHISE FEES

Fees collected from utility companies for the use of city streets and right-of-way in order to provide services, such as natural gas, telephone, cable television, and fiber optic cable service.

### BUSINESS TAXES

Revenues from occupational licenses issued to businesses and financial institutions.

### ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE TAXES

Taxes on the sale, distribution, or consumption of distilled spirits, malt beverages, and wine.

### INSURANCE PREMIUM TAXES

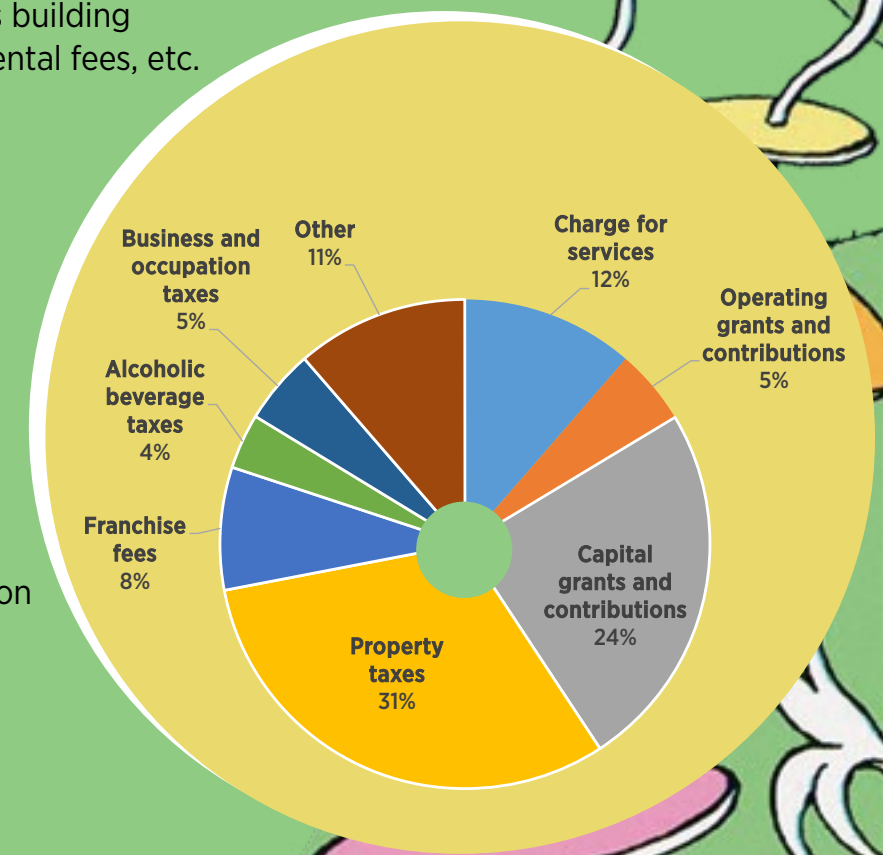
Taxes on insurance premiums written by companies conducting business within the city.

### HOTEL/MOTEL TAXES

Excise taxes charged for hotel rooms or accommodations.

### OTHER

Includes monies earned from investments of city funds and donations.





## WHERE DID THE MONEY GO?

The city's expenses totaled \$18.5 million for fiscal year 2020: 34% was related to public works, 28% public safety (police services), and 16% general government.

### PUBLIC SAFETY

Costs associated with maintaining a police department which includes maintenance of order, law, safety, and other matters affecting the public welfare.

### GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Cost of supporting legislative activities, human resources, city clerk, finances, legal, data processing, public information, and general government facilities.

### HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

Cost of planning, inspections, code enforcement, and economic development.

### CULTURE & RECREATION

Cost of maintaining the city's park system and coordinating special events.

### INTEREST ON LONG-TERM DEBT

Interest payments for parks, open space, and construction of City Hall.

### OTHER

Cost of municipal court operations and tourism.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENT STATEMENTS

Suwanee strives to share financial information openly with citizens and others. In an effort to provide an easy-to-understand summary of the city's financial activities, the city prepares a Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR).

The data for this report was taken from our audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2020 and includes financial data from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, unless otherwise stated.

Each year the City of Suwanee prepares an audited CAFR that provides detailed information about the city's financial position. Prepared using financial reporting models prescribed by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB).

Suwanee's CAFR is available in its entirety on the Docs & Downloads page at [suwanee.com](http://suwanee.com).

The COVID stared down at Suwanee  
and popped its eyes  
For what it viewed was a rather  
shocking surprise!

Every Suwaneetian living in Suwanee,  
the tall and the small,  
Was still quite joyous and happy,  
despite it all!

The Suwaneetians,  
as they continued to forge ahead,  
Uttered something quite remarkable;  
and this is what they said:

“We have brains in our heads  
And feet in our shoes  
We will steer this community  
In the direction we choose!  
We know what we know  
And together we’ll decide  
what direction we’ll go.”



And will they succeed?  
Yes! They will, indeed!  
(98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed.)

**Then their beloved mayor  
Raised his glass in a toast,  
To kindness, patience, and love!  
The things we need the most.**







## CITY COUNCIL

**MAYOR** Jimmy Burnette 770-945-3492  
**COUNCIL** Linnea Miller 678-592-4150  
Pete Charpentier 770-757-3323  
Heather Hall 410-979-7905  
Beth Hilscher 678-546-3388  
Larry Pettiford 678-464-3651

## MANAGEMENT TEAM

**CITY MANAGER** Marty Allen 770-945-8996  
**ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER** Denise Brinson 770-904-3385  
**CITY CLERK** Robyn O'Donnell 770-904-2790  
**FINANCIAL SERVICES** Amie Sakmar 770-904-2797  
**PLANNING AND INSPECTIONS** Josh Campbell 770-904-3372  
**POLICE CHIEF** Cass Mooney 770-904-7610  
**PUBLIC WORKS** Bob Dean 770-904-3373