

# Suwanee connects

suwanee.com | August 2022

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Downtown Receives National Main Street Accreditation

## AUGUST CONCERT IS GONNA BE *Lit*

Join us in Suwanee Town Center Park on Saturday, August 13 for the 18th Annual August Concert, headlined by **Lit!**

Considered one of the preeminent bands of the post-grunge late 90's, Lit helped define an entire generation of SoCal power punk. The band has released six worldwide studio albums, including the RIAA-Certified Platinum *A Place in the Sun*, which featured *My Own Worst Enemy*, winner of the Billboard Music Award for Modern Rock Song of the Year.

"We still know how to have a good time. We still party together and maybe get into a little trouble here and there," said lead vocalist Ajay Popoff. "But we also have other things that play into our songs now, like marriage, divorce, kids who are growing up, and parents who aren't getting any younger. We're evolving as people and learning."

Music begins at 6:00 pm with **Vinny Masino**, followed by **Tuk Smith and the Restless Hearts** at 6:30. Beer, wine and food will be available from Town Center businesses and on-site vendors; as always, no BYOB. Off-site parking and shuttles are available; visit **Suwanee.com** for more information.



**AUGUST CONCERT** SATURDAY, AUGUST 13  
TOWN CENTER PARK  
6-10 PM

"High-octane performances that have thrilled millions of fans across the world"  
- Center Stage Magazine



# Town Center on Main + DeLay Nature Park



## CONSTRUCTION BEGINS SOON

The long-awaited expansion of Town Center Park is set to break ground in the coming months

The 25-acre site of the future Town Center on Main and DeLay Nature Park sits behind the Suwanee library and PlayTown Suwanee on Suwanee Dam Road. The property was purchased in 2002 as an early acquisition of the community-driven comprehensive park and open space initiative. The Suwanee City Council unanimously approved a master plan for a future city park in September 2019.

City officials worked with a team of professionals and sought input from community members via stakeholder interviews, over 1,000 in-person and online surveys of park users, four planning workshops, two design charrettes, and a variety of other meetings and presentations. Concepts were developed and refined through this process with the needs and wants of stakeholders in mind. The community input led to a design that maximizes the opportunities of the site and provides diverse experiences.

“The project has taken time to get to this point: environmental approvals, necessary coordination with Gwinnett County and adjacent property owners, Covid-19, and other items along the way,” said Suwanee City Manager Marty Allen. “Now we’re headed into the home stretch. We are in the final stages of engineering and design.”

Town Center on Main will be an urban-style greenspace with a unique character, personality, and purpose, similar to but separate from the Town Center Park we know. Much like how City Hall relates to the existing park, the Suwanee library will serve as the anchor for this new space. The majority of the site – roughly 15 of the wooded 25 acres along the existing Brushy Creek Greenway – will remain largely undisturbed as the DeLay Nature Park.

Once completed, Town Center Park and Town Center on Main will function as a unified space, linked by Station Park (located next to the police station) and the pedestrian tunnel under the railroad. The topography of the new park will allow it to overlook Town Center, further enhancing the relationship of the two spaces.



A big change this area will see is the realignment of Main Street, which will shift around the park and exit onto Suwanee Dam Road at the traffic signal and the new Gwinnett County fire station. This shift will allow the existing median break on Suwanee Dam Road at Main Street to close, greatly improving the safety and traffic flow at that intersection.

“The success of Town Center Park has exceeded all expectations,” said Mayor Jimmy Burnette. “The park draws over 300,000 visitors annually to events, as well as regularly serving our 20,000 citizens. The new park will help ease the demand on the existing park and surrounding community.”



### The park plan features a mixture of urban & rural environments, including:

- A roughly 900-foot, elevated **signature bridge** for pedestrian and bicycle use, spanning the entire park and crossing a one-acre water feature,
- An open **terrace plaza** at the peak of the park’s elevation with **large-scale pavilions**,
- Sandpit volleyball courts**, and
- An iconic **public art** piece.



# Mayor Jimmy Burnette **WINNER** OF THE 2022 STARR AWARD

Award recognizes significant contributions in creating a

## unique & vibrant downtown

The Georgia Cities Foundation (GCF) awarded Suwanee Mayor Jimmy Burnette the 2022 Starr Award at the Georgia Municipal Association's Annual Convention in Savannah on June 27.

Established in 2019, the Starr Award recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution toward creating a unique and vibrant environment in the downtown area of a city in Georgia.

Burnette has served as Mayor of Suwanee since 2012 after serving as a member of the City Council from 1996 until 2011. He was a charter member of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), serving for 12 years until he was elected mayor.

Burnette served as the liaison between the DDA and City Council, forging consensus to continuously grow, develop, and foster a vibrant environment in downtown Suwanee. He advocated for acquiring and rehabilitating Pierce's Corner – one of Suwanee's oldest structures – in order to reactivate historic Old Town Suwanee.

Burnette has also been intricately involved in every Comprehensive and Downtown Master Plan for the past 25+ years, with the most recent project – the redesign of Buford Highway into a walkable urban boulevard – nearing completion.

“Rather than resisting inevitable change, Mayor Burnette chooses instead to embrace and guide change for the greatest benefit to our community,” said Suwanee Economic Development Manager Chris Hardin. “He presented a vision of unique and vibrant growth for the City of Suwanee, and fostered that vision over the years by bringing together community, business, and civic leaders in the city.”

The Starr Award is given annually in memory of Mike Starr, who served as the Georgia Cities Foundation's President for two decades until his death in 2019. The Georgia Cities Foundation seeks to create this permanent legacy in Starr's memory by celebrating those who emulate his best traits: visionary, innovator, servant leader, and champion for downtowns.

“

Mayor Burnette has provided long-term leadership and vision as Suwanee grew into a regional leader of smart managed growth, downtown development, and open spaces. He is always thinking about what is next, how to improve, and how to bring people along.

Suwanee Economic Development Manager  
Chris Hardin

”



# STORMWATER UTILITY FAQ

On June 28, the Suwanee City Council voted to enact a stormwater utility fee to help offset the costs of stormwater infrastructure management.

## What is a stormwater utility?

A stormwater utility - or user fee system - is a program with a user fee charge to help local government recover the costs of managing stormwater runoff generated by a parcel or customer. The utility **creates a reserve** for stormwater management services; funds collected pay for stormwater management-related projects and regulatory compliance programs.

## What is the money used for?

In short, the **fees are used to operate and fund a stormwater management program**. This program includes maintaining and repairing streams, ponds, stormwater pipes, ditches, catch basins, and other similar features and costs. Typical stormwater management programs include the following functions:

- Drainage improvement projects
- Storm system maintenance and repairs
- Floodplain management
- Cleaning of pipes and ditches
- Water quality protection and improvement
- Compliance with state and federal regulations

For Suwanee, it is anticipated that most of the funds will go directly towards preventative maintenance and repairs of stormwater infrastructure.

## Why is this needed?

Stormwater pipes, catch basins, and related infrastructure **deteriorate over time**, impairing their ability to convey stormwater, thereby threatening property and causing flooding and road closures. To address these problems and comply with increasing state and federal regulations, many communities develop and implement comprehensive stormwater management programs funded by a stormwater utility user fee system. Maintenance and repairs to this infrastructure is very costly. A **dedicated funding source** will help the city better maintain a functional system.

Stormwater utilities are a **more equitable way** to fund stormwater systems. Those that generate more demand pay their proportionate share. Those that have less demand in turn pay less.

## Why now?

The city engaged professional consulting firm Integrated Science & Engineering (ISE) to evaluate the city's system; ISE identified around \$12 million in needed maintenance and repairs. The stormwater utility provides funding for a **proactive maintenance-based approach**, rather than a reactive repair-based approach. Maintenance is significantly cheaper than repairs. (As an example, the city recently had a significant pipe failure that cost about \$2 million to replace; the city also recently engaged in preventative maintenance on a very similar pipe that cost only \$400,000.)

Many of the city's stormwater pipes are corrugated metal pipes that were installed in the 1980's, 1990's, and early 2000's. These pipes have typical lifespans of 20-30 years. As such, some of the pipes are nearing the end of their expected term of service. Many of these pipes can be rehabilitated with preventative measures that will extend their service lives by 30+ years.

## How are the fees calculated?

Generally speaking, the fees are based on the amount of impervious surface on a parcel. Impervious surfaces include asphalt and concrete driveways and parking lots, rooftops, and other features that prevent water from absorbing into the ground, thereby **increasing stormwater runoff** into pipes and streams.

The amount of impervious surface area is related to amount of stormwater runoff the site produces; this increased demand impacts the local government's drainage system and local waterbodies. This information is then used to determine a parcel's proportionate share of the cost-of-service provided by the local government. The fee is designed to be **fair and equitable to all property owners** that utilize the local government's drainage system, facilities, and services. The Stormwater Utility Ordinance contains a specific formula for calculating the fees.

## Was the community involved in this? Did the community have input?

Yes. It was a community solution for an ongoing challenge. The city established a **Citizen Stakeholder Committee** to review the study done by the consultants and make their own recommendations. This 14-member group of citizens met multiple times over several months. Ultimately, the group recommended to the City Council to create a Stormwater Utility. ISE also provided several presentations to the City Council during various public meetings. There will be ongoing additional public information efforts in the coming months.

Scan to read related articles from the April and June 2022 newsletters.

APRIL



JUNE



## How much will it cost me?

Most **detached homeowners will pay less than \$7.50 per month** (around \$89 per year). Attached townhouse owners will pay about \$35 per year. Commercial properties and other parcels with large impervious areas will pay proportionately more based on their specific amounts of impervious surface. A typical shopping center is expected to pay around \$15,000 annually.

## How much money will the utility generate?

It is estimated to generate about \$1.5 million per year in the early years.

## Can the money be used for other things?

No. It is dedicated to stormwater-related items.

## Do other communities have this?

Yes. There are stormwater utilities all over the nation. Gwinnett County and nine other cities in Gwinnett County already have stormwater utilities in place.

## I have a large yard with little impervious surface. Can I do something to avoid or reduce the fee?

If a parcel is **vacant, or has less than 500 square feet of impervious surface, there is no fee.**

The city is working on a credit manual to offer credits that can partially offset the fee for sites that meet certain criteria, which will be available at Suwanee.com when it is available.

## How will this be billed?

It will be part of the property tax bill.

## STORMWATER UTILITY PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

AUGUST 25 | 6:30 PM  
SUWANEE CITY HALL





# From THE DESK of

JOSH CAMPBELL

CITY OF SUWANEES PLANNING DIRECTOR

## A Better Buford Highway is Finally (FINALLY) Here



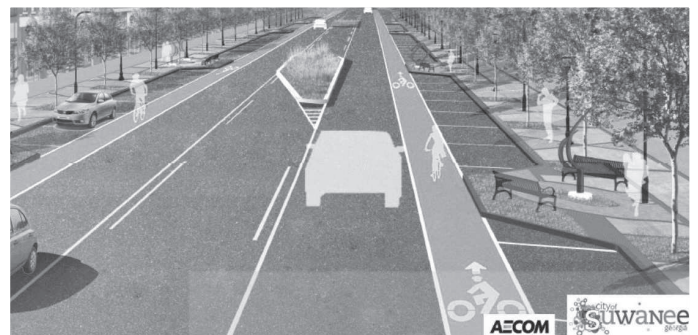
In metro Atlanta, Buford Highway has long been the poster child for lack of walkability, with critics using it as a prime example of the challenges of being a pedestrian in metro Atlanta. In more developed areas, the thoroughfare is a wide multi-lane highway often with no sidewalks and intense auto-oriented development: intimidating for pedestrians to use as a transportation corridor and virtually impossible to cross. In Suwanee, it was a rural two-lane highway with a foreseeable future as a four-lane divided highway, similar to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.

With Buford Highway running through Suwanee's historic downtown and Town Center, it soon became clear that if the city's residents wanted to **maintain the walkability of our downtown**, and we would need to plan for a different future for Buford Highway. The city envisioned a downtown street that welcomed walkers, cyclists, and drivers alike.

And so, in 2008, the City of Suwanee included the goal of redesigning Buford Highway in its comprehensive plan, beginning the city's journey to make Buford Highway a more complete street, designed to accommodate walkers, bikers, and vehicles. This type of street would **encourage development consistent with Town Center** to extend south on Buford Highway towards Russell Street, better connecting our historic Old Town area to our vibrant new Town Center.

In 2009 and 2010, the city developed a concept that clarified our vision for Buford Highway as a low speed, two-lane city street with a center turn lane interspersed with medians, instead of a high speed four-lane highway. The street would include:

- A roundabout at the southern end of downtown to announce your arrival into downtown and encourage vehicles to slow down,
- Wide comfortable sidewalks,
- Street trees to provide shade and separation from the vehicles,
- Street lights for a safe nighttime experience,
- On-street parking to help support downtown businesses and slow down drivers, and
- Bike lanes to separate cyclists from vehicles and walkers.



## BUFORD HWY TRANSPORTATION STUDY



With this vision in mind, city leaders met with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) leaders to make sure they supported the city's vision for Buford Highway, which is a state road. GDOT gave their support and the city moved forward with the engineering of the project.

During this time, behind-the-scenes work involved pursuing grants to help with the cost of engineering, making decisions regarding moving above ground utilities below ground, partnering with the county to plan for the installation of sewer lines, obtaining federal/state funding to help with the significant construction costs, acquiring right-of-way/easements, and, finally, selecting a contractor to construct the project. All of this happened in the context of complying with state and federal requirements.

GDOT selected the contractor through their process and is managing construction of the project. The city remains involved in the project, with GDOT responsible for managing the project on a day-to-day basis. Construction was set to start in January of 2018 and finish in 2020 (see sidebar).

Now that the Buford Highway renovation is nearing completion, we hope our residents will be able to enjoy this extension of Town Center in a way that would have been impossible if it developed as a four-lane divided highway. The Better Buford Highway Project will contribute to making downtown Suwanee a place where residents and visitors alike are able to drive downtown and walk around comfortably and safely.

**Josh Campbell has worked for the city of Suwanee for the last 22 years. After starting as an intern in 1999, he was hired as a permanent employee in the Planning Department where he spent the last 13 years as Planning and Inspections Director. His first major project was the Open Space and Recreational Needs Assessment, which laid the foundation for Suwanee's network of parks and trails, and more recently he has been involved with managing the reconstruction of Buford Highway.**

# Let's Address the Elephant in the Room MIDDLE OF THE ROAD: WHAT TOOK SO LONG?

The Better Buford Highway Project experienced significant delays caused by a number of issues:

- Record-breaking rains in 2018 (the second wettest year on record!)
- Coordinating new private sector projects, including Siena, Stillfire, Skye, Harvest Park, and Echo Park
- Coordinating additional city projects, including Station Park and the courthouse expansion
- Seven different GDOT project managers over the four+ year period, each needing time to understand the project
- Project complexities requiring coordination of various elements that are not typically part of a GDOT project
- Supply chain issues
- And a little thing called Covid-19



APRIL 2021 BUFORD HIGHWAY  
NEWSLETTER ARTICLE



SUWANEE EARNS 2022

# National Main Street ACCREDITATION

CITY HAS HELD DISTINCTION SINCE 2000

The City of Suwanee earned designation as a 2022 Accredited Main Street America program, a status 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 a proven track record of successfully applying the Main Street Approach.



The performance of the Suwanee Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is evaluated annually by Georgia Main Street, which works in partnership with Main Street America to identify the local programs that meet rigorous national performance standards. These criteria are used to evaluate those communities that are building meaningful and sustainable revitalization programs. Standards include fostering strong public-private partnerships, supporting small and locally owned businesses, and actively preserving historic places, spaces, and cultural assets.

After years of planning and aligning, many DDA projects came to fruition in 2021. Leasing was finalized for the 12,276-square-foot mixed-use space in Solis Phase I (Siena), resulting in two restaurants, a small farmer's market, and a real estate office. A co-working

facility is scheduled to open Q1 2023 inside the 10,000-square-foot space in Solis Phase II (Skye). The DDA continued to lease space to StillFire, a successful downtown brewery. The DDA was awarded the Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund on behalf of Seaside Oyster Bar, a new restaurant addition to our Town Center.

“With the years of the planning that went into these projects, it’s satisfying to see them come alive in our downtown, to continuously enhance our award-winning Town Center Park,” said Chris Hardin, Economic Development Manager and DDA/Main Street Director for the City of Suwanee.

In 2021, Main Street America programs generated \$5.76 billion in local reinvestment, helped open 6,601 net new businesses, generated 30,402 net new jobs, catalyzed the rehabilitation of 10,595 historic buildings, and leveraged 1,427,729 volunteer hours. On average, for every dollar that a Main Street program spent, it generated \$19.34 of new investment back into the community.







# GO BEHIND THE BADGE

Suwanee Citizens Police Academy  
Accepting Applications for Fall Session

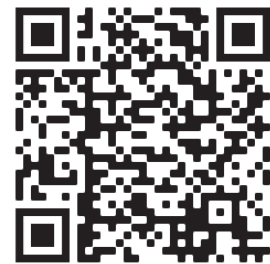


Suwanee's Citizens Police Academy is a seven-week program designed to give the public working knowledge of the risks, responsibilities, and day-to-day functions of the Suwanee Police Department.

The academy offers classroom training and hands-on experiences in crime scene processing, traffic stops, building searches, crime prevention, and narcotics identification, as well as an opportunity to patrol Suwanee alongside an officer. The program is designed to open and maintain communication between citizens and the police department.

The fall Citizens Police Academy session is offered on Monday evenings, September 26-November 7 from 6:30-9:00 pm at the Suwanee Police Substation at 2966 Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road. Classes are free to the public, but space is limited and preference is given to Suwanee residents or those who work in the City of Suwanee. A criminal and driver history background is required for all applicants.

Notarized applications will be accepted at the Suwanee Police Station until 5 pm, September 21. Visit **Suwanee.com** or scan the QR for an application.



**SCAN HERE**  
for application

## QUESTIONS?

Contact City of Suwanee  
Police Training Director  
Lt. Bryan Hickey at  
**770-904-7609** or  
**bhickey@suwanee.com**  
or Theresa Miranda at  
**770-904-7669** or  
**tmiranda@suwanee.com**

FY2023 BUDGET ASSUMES

# MILLAGE TO REMAIN AT 4.93

SAME AS PAST NINE YEARS

The City of Suwanee began the new fiscal year on July 1, 2022 with a \$16 million balanced operating budget. This year's budget represents a 6.9% increase in operating expenditures as compared to the FY2022 amended budget.

### Suwanee's \$16 million FY2023 budget includes:

- 115 full-time and 12 part-time positions, including one new full-time and one new part-time position
- Implementation of the Compensation Study completed in June 2022
- Three percent increase in group health insurance
- Developing and implementing a new co-responder police program
- \$551,000 facilities and right-of-way maintenance program
- \$442,000 capital funding

After analyzing the 2022 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 ten years. This proposed millage rate of 4.93 is a rollback millage rate increase of .771 mills, an 18.54% increase in property taxes based on market value growth.

The City Council is expected to adopt the FY2023 millage rate at its regular August 23 meeting. The city will hold three public hearings at City Hall on August 11 at 5:30 pm, and August 23 at noon and 6:30 pm, before adopting the millage rate.

Scan to view the City of Suwanee's FY2023 budget.

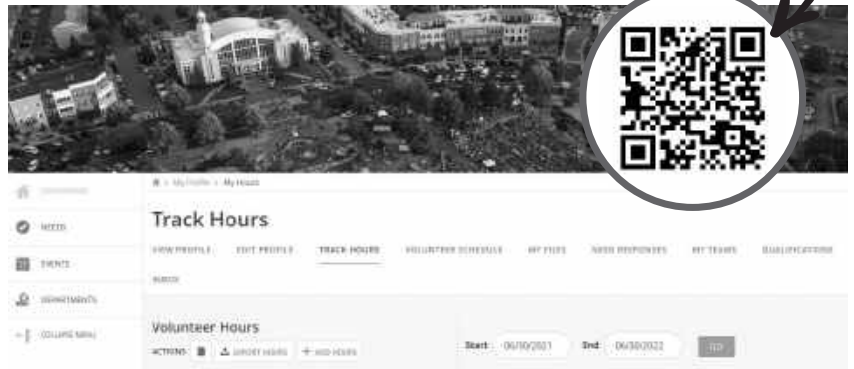


## City Unveils Upgraded Volunteer Program



Have you ever been to a fun Suwanee event, wondered how public art is chosen, read about Planning Commission decisions, or seen something great and wondered how you could be a part of it? The City of Suwanee has revamped its volunteer program to make it easier for citizens to get plugged in and find volunteer opportunities with the city that best suit their talents and interests!

The city partnered with Galaxy Digital to streamline the volunteer experience and provide data useful to both the city and the volunteers. Those interested can visit [Suwanee.com](http://Suwanee.com) or scan the QR to create a unique volunteer profile outlining areas of interest.



Once the profile is complete, volunteers will be notified when opportunities arise that might interest them. The system will also keep track of volunteer hours with the city, creating a volunteer resume. Additionally, students who need volunteer hours for school credit will enjoy the simplified tracking system.

"The City of Suwanee loves to engage with its citizens in a variety of ways. Using diverse talents and interests makes Suwanee a great community in which to live, work and play," said Event & Community Outreach Manager Amy Doherty.

The city abounds with volunteer opportunities in a variety of areas, such as with the police, serving on boards and committees, working with kids, and helping at events. There are even opportunities for our younger citizens to volunteer as well! Contact Amy Doherty at [adoherty@suwanee.com](mailto:adoherty@suwanee.com) or visit [Suwanee.com](http://Suwanee.com) for more details.



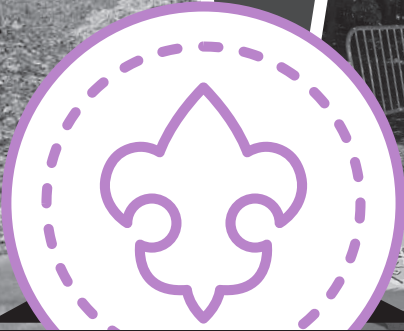
# GLASS RECYCLING

Great news, Suwanee residents! You can now recycle glass bottles and jars from 7 am-5 pm, Monday through Friday, at the Suwanee Public Works facility at 3625 Swiftwater Park Drive.



Please remove lids, caps, and corks, and make sure that your glass is clean, rinsed, and free of any debris or food

Please only place glass in the collection bin; bags and boxes that are used to deliver the glass should be discarded off site.



## SCOUT PROJECTS

Scout **Parker Mashburn** of Troop 1534 chose to enhance the historic Jackson Street Cemetery for his Eagle Award project. Brush, saplings, and vines were cleared to establish paths and gravesite access and viewing. Six new benches were installed and natural mulch was added to form a path at the Jackson Street entryway and along seating areas. Trees on Jackson Street were limbed up for viewing and community awareness.

The sidewalks at PlayTown Suwanee are cheerier and more attractive thanks to Girl Scout **Lena Towne** of Troop 2440! Her Gold Award project, entitled 'PlayTown Painters: A Work of heART,' showcases work from different artists throughout the community. Finalists were selected by a team of professional judges from the art world, and the artists put paint to sidewalk in June.



Scan the QR to learn more about the PlayTown Painters





## UPCOMING EVENTS

official newsletter of the city of suwanee, georgia

### AUGUST 22

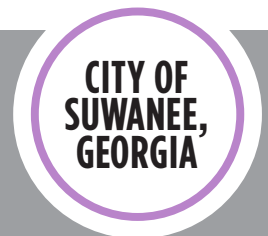
<b>2</b>	Planning Commission Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>5</b>	Food Truck Friday	5:30 pm
<b>6</b>	Gwinnett Chamber Button Down Dash 5K	7:45 am
<b>6</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>8</b>	Suwanee Fest Planning Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>10</b>	Suwanee Public Art Commission Meeting	6:00 pm
<b>11</b>	City Council Workshop	5:30 pm
<b>13</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>13</b>	August Concert	6:00 pm
<b>16</b>	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>20</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>23</b>	City Council Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>27</b>	Annandale Village Extra Mile 5K	7:30 am
<b>27</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>30</b>	Downtown Development Authority	7:30 am

### SEPTEMBER 22

<b>3</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>6</b>	Planning Commission Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>7</b>	Parade Participants Meeting	6:00 pm
<b>10</b>	Care for Cops 5K	8:00 am
<b>10</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>12</b>	Suwanee Fest Planning Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>14</b>	Suwanee Public Art Commission Meeting	6:00 pm
<b>15</b>	City Council Workshop	5:30 pm
<b>17</b>	Suwanee Fest	9:00 am
<b>18</b>	Suwanee Fest	Noon
<b>20</b>	Downtown Development Authority	7:30 am
<b>20</b>	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting	6:30 pm
<b>24</b>	Farmers Market	8:00 am
<b>27</b>	City Council Meeting	6:30 pm

**MAYOR** Jimmy Burnette 770/868-7115  
**COUNCIL** Pete Charpentier 770/757-3323  
Heather Hall 410/979-7905  
Beth Hilscher 678/546-3388  
Linnea Miller 678/592-4150  
Larry Pettiford 678/464-3651

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**ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER** Denise Brinson 770/904-3385  
**CITY CLERK** Robyn O'Donnell 770/904-2790  
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