

city of
suwanee
georgia

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

**ASK FOR ANSWERS.
LEARN THE WHY.
LOVE YOUR COMMUNITY.**



Why?



Welcome to the City of Suwanee's 2023 Annual Report. If you have lived in Suwanee for a while, you are aware that we like to take a more engaging approach to sharing our city-centric accomplishments.

If you are new to Suwanee and receiving your first report, welcome! We hope our efforts towards providing facts, figures, and information in a light-hearted and fun way brings you closer to our one-of-a-kind community.

This year's report focuses on a curious little girl and her quest to understand why our Mayor is so excited about Suwanee.

Join us on this adventure and scan the QR codes along the way to dig a little deeper.

Once upon a time, as the Mayor of Suwanee meandered through Town Center, he happened upon a small girl who just wouldn't stop asking one small question... "Why?"

Whatcha thinking about Mr. Mayor?

OH HELLO! I was just thinking about how I would have loved this space when I was your age. Town Center is even better than I dreamed it would be.

Why?

Because over the last 20 years, we've filled this park with new public art and over 40 events annually that bring 300,000 guests and our 23,000 citizens together. We've created such a wonderful place for our community.



Placemaking

New parking signage was added to Town Center, making it easier for patrons to utilize all 985 public parking spaces.

Town Center Park hosted 35 Farmers Markets and 48 events, including new options such as the Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Celebration, African American Arts & Culture Festival, and the Aurora Theatre's Al Son de la Musica, as well as expanding Summer Porch Jam in Old Town.



SCAN FOR MORE INFO



The city was the recipient of another Gwinnett Creativity Fund grant, for the 97' x 30' mural on the Pierce's Corner building in Old Town Suwanee. *Futurist*, by Shannon Lake, features colorful abstracts, flowers, and an astronaut – symbolizing hope in the future. The historic building is being renovated by the Downtown Development Authority in an effort to strengthen the economic viability of the area.



Why?



The city unveiled a giant, awe-inspiring *Ultimate Participation Trophy* in April! Created by artist Phil Proctor, this piece was constructed out of nearly 4,000 trophies, plaques, and medals donated by the citizens of Suwanee and the greater Gwinnett community. Funding for this project was provided by a grant from the Gwinnett Creativity Fund.

The city completed a project that placed *informative signage* at six local cultural assets of *historical significance*. The signage includes text, photos, and a link to videos with more detailed information. Ashlee Tam conducted the historical research as part of Suwanee's historic downtown preservation efforts and her Girl Scout Gold Award Project.

Locations include:

- Suwanee Methodist Church
- Pierce's Corner
- Suwanee Caboose
- Everett's Music Barn
- Rhodes Hotel (Huthmaker Fine Violins)
- Jackson Street Cemetery



Engagement

The city added two **public parklets** on Town Center Avenue, creating new outdoor spaces for visitors to sit, eat, or gather.



The Suwanee Youth Leaders completed their inaugural **Cheers Service Project**: the 'Cheers Spot' hang out space, located on the lawn behind City Hall, which features plenty of seating and colorful murals, including a creative stair mural.



Water bottle refilling stations were installed in Suwanee Creek and Town Center Parks. In addition, PlayTown Suwanee and Suwanee Creek Park bathrooms received upgrades.



1,200 volunteers transformed a dirt lot into the kind of playground dreams are made of! Lifelong Suwanee tians and new residents alike, parents and grandparents, city staff, and groups representing many facets of our community worked together to rebuild **PlayTown Suwanee, a one-of-a-kind, 13,000-square-foot playground** from the ground up.

The custom-designed playground features elements reminiscent of the character of the original, while meeting modern standards, and utilized **recycled materials that are long lasting and virtually maintenance-free.**

Prior to the rebuild, pickets and tiles from the original build were rescued from PlayTown and returned to their original purchasers. 1,100 new custom pickets were installed as part of the fence that surrounds the renovated playground.

Because we didn't have anything like this when I was younger! Years ago, the city began focusing its efforts on building parks and places for everyone in the community.

Suwanee now is home to lots of unique parks, trails, and greenways. We are also building PlayTown Suwanee 2.0 and expanding downtown with Town Center on Main + DeLay Nature Park.



Why?



Because Town Center Park has been so successful and such an important part of our community. It was built when the city's population was just 11,000 - Suwanee has doubled in size since then! The expansion of downtown is about providing for the next 20 years.

There's an old saying: "one generation plants a tree, the next enjoys its shade." Just like Town Center Park was a gift to the current generation, Town Center on Main + DeLay Nature Park will be a gift to the next.

Quality Infrastructure

Grant funding was secured and a designer was selected for the **Suwanee Pedestrian and Bicycle Loop**, a continuous multi-use path with connections to the Suwanee Creek Greenway, downtown Suwanee, and other regional trails. A grant was also obtained for the Roundabout Masterplan.

A **backyard chicken ordinance** was approved, as well as a related zoning ordinance amendment, allowing for the issuance of Suwanee's first backyard chicken permit.

After more than a year of grading and building, **Town Center on Main + DeLay Nature Park** is beginning to take shape. Noteworthy features include a 1,200-foot-long park-spanning bridge, two large water features, and a veterans' memorial. Upon completion, Town Center Park and Town Center on Main will seamlessly integrate into a unified space, creating a cohesive "neighborhood" to encompass the Suwanee Library, PlayTown Suwanee, and Fire Station 13.



PLANNING & INSPECTIONS BY THE NUMBERS

3 neighborhood developments closed out
60 right of way permits issued
9 rezoning requests
7 administrative variance requests
7 variance requests
5 development permits completed

3 development permits issued
4 special use permit requests
1 waiver request
1 alternate architectural review
2 annexations
233 code enforcement issues
10 zoning certification letters
5,418 building inspections
410 building permits
55 permanent sign permits
83 temporary sign permits

Why?



The Russell Street sidewalk project was completed, which included the conversion of White Street into a one-way northbound road between Davis and Russell streets.

Sidewalks were completed on Moore Road and Settles Bridge Road and 3.2 miles of roads were resurfaced.

Thanks to scheduled street sweeping, storm inlet catch basin cleaning, and right-of-way litter pick-up, the city's public works department removed 13 tons of litter that would have otherwise contaminated runoff into nearby streams.



After the creation of a stormwater utility last year, the public works department began implementing a comprehensive stormwater management program. About \$1.5 million in improvements were made to over 30 stormwater projects throughout the city, ranging from preventative maintenance and rehabilitation to comprehensive repairs and replacements.



City Hall hosted its annual paper shredding event to maintain the promotion of electric files, and the city's glass recycling program reclaimed 17 tons of glass.



The City of Suwanee participated in a "Food Fight" collection on behalf of the North Gwinnett Co-Op. After a valiant effort, the City of Sugar Hill bested Suwanee, 3,024 lbs. to 2,951 lbs. But the real winner was the Co-Op!

For the seventh consecutive year, the city enacted a mosquito control program in an effort to cut down on insect-borne illness.

Six first aid/AED/CPR classes were held at City Hall for Suwanee employees. City Hall also hosted four blood drives on behalf of the American Red Cross.

Because it's important to plan for the future! One of the biggest jobs we have is to think about what we want Suwanee to be in the future. We have to be intentional if we want to continue to exceed the community's hopes and dreams.



Why?



Because we can't just hope Suwanee continues to be great; we have to set goals and make plans for reaching them. Take the Suwanee Police Department, whose guiding philosophy focuses on community interaction and police visibility. It's about being proactive.

Why?



The Suwanee Police Department hosted 128 community outreach events in 2023, as well as two Citizens Police Academy sessions and multiple child safety seat checks.



Suwanee Police Lieutenant Bryan Hickey graduated from the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

Four recruits completed 264 hours of instruction and graduated from the Public Safety Academy.



Trained mental health clinicians provided assistance to 143 individuals as part of Suwanee Cares program. Suwanee Cares is a behavioral health unit that dispatches a clinician with an officer on calls pertaining to possible mental health situations. This partnership helps members of our community gain help that they might not receive otherwise. The department also hosted a four-hour mental health first aid class.

The police department explored an alternative fuel pilot program with the purchase of its first all-electric police vehicle.

Community Safety

Six officers were certified in chainsaw operation to assist during inclement weather, and two officers became firearm instructors, bringing the department total to four.

The department participated in multiple multi-agency Special Response Team operations, and also hosted an Integrating Communications Assessment and Tactics class at the Training Center.



The department deployed a new software system that allows dispatchers to send text messages to 911 callers within the city limits, connecting callers directly to the department and greatly improving communication between dispatchers and callers.



Financial Responsibility

The city **maintained its 4.93 millage rate**; this rate has remained the same or reduced for 21 consecutive years. The city maintained its AAA bond rating from Standard & Poor for the tenth consecutive year.

The city updated **informative and instructive publications** for millage rates, understanding your property tax bill, 2023 Occupational Tax Certificate, 2023 Beverage License Certificate, and 2023 Property Tax Bill.

CITY CREDIT RATING

Cities borrow money to pay for capital projects such as buildings, parks, and roads. Like a home mortgage, bonds allow the City to borrow money and then pay those funds back over many years.

Similar to how people receive a credit score, credit rating agencies evaluate the risk a lender would incur when lending to a city. There are three main bond rating agencies: Fitch Ratings, Moody's Investor's Services, and S&P Global Ratings.

Suwanee's bonds have obtained the highest rating, a **AAA rating, from S&P**. Having a AAA credit rating saves taxpayers money in the form of lower interest rates when the city seeks to borrow money.

Because proactive cities are thriving cities. The city of Suwanee takes initiative by being thoughtful, focused, and intentional in everything we do. The work of our finance department is another excellent example!



SWELL, the city's wellness program, received over \$18,000 in funding credits from Cigna.



1,124 business licenses were renewed.

The finance department successfully negotiated **health benefits renewal rates** below the industry average while enhancing the city's vision coverage and life insurance coverages.

The department changed workers compensation and risk management carriers due to a proposed 30% renewal rate, saving approximately \$30,000 for the city.



Because...
you know what,
let me just
show you!

Oh, I get it!
Thanks, Mister!



Accountability in Financial Reporting

This financial section has been developed to provide the community with a summary of the City's financial activities and position, in a transparent and easily understood format.

The information included summarizes the fiscal year 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) and includes financial data from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. The ACFR is a more complete, independently audited, financial presentation prepared using financial reporting models prescribed by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

Suwanee's **ACFR** is available in its entirety on the Documents & Downloads page at suwanee.com



The Budget: The City's Spending Plan

Adopted each spring by the City Council, the Budget is the legally authorized spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year. Suwanee's Budget is available at suwanee.com. Another tool to find more information about our city's finances is Suwanee's Open Budget Portal. **The Open Budget Portal** is part of Suwanee's commitment to improving transparency by providing an interactive guided view of current operating financial information, affording a transparent look at how public funds are allocated.



General Fund

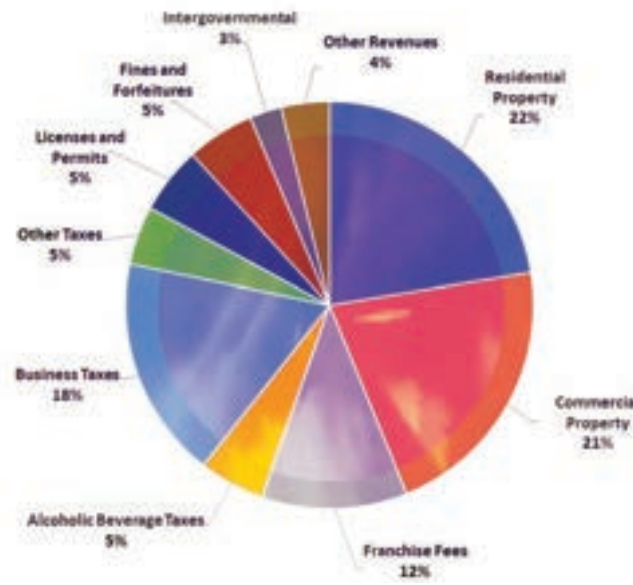
The General Fund accounts for revenues and expenditures to carry out basic governmental functions. Examples of governmental functions would include police protection, parks and recreation, planning and zoning, building inspections, code enforcement, economic and community development, and municipal court.

What We Owe - City Bonded Debit

At the end of fiscal year 2023, outstanding bonded debt totaled \$29.5 million, which is comprised of \$5.1 million in general obligation debt (backed by the full faith and credit of the City) and \$24.4 million in revenue bonds (debt obligated by the City through an intergovernmental agreement with Suwanee's Urban Redevelopment Agency).

Where Did the Money Come From?

Total General Fund revenues for the fiscal year 2023 were \$18.2 million. The largest source of revenues was from property taxes (43%) of which 22% was from residential property and 21% from commercial property. Other main revenues sources include business taxes (18%) and franchise fees (12%).



Net Position

Net position is an important indicator of financial health. It represents total assets minus total liabilities on an organization-wide basis.

An unrestricted asset reserve can be used to measure an organization's ability to withstand a financial emergency. The City's FY 2023 overall net position increased by \$17.2 million to \$123 million. The table shows net position trends for the past five years. Net position has been steadily improving. This means that the City's financial health is strong and continues to grow stronger.

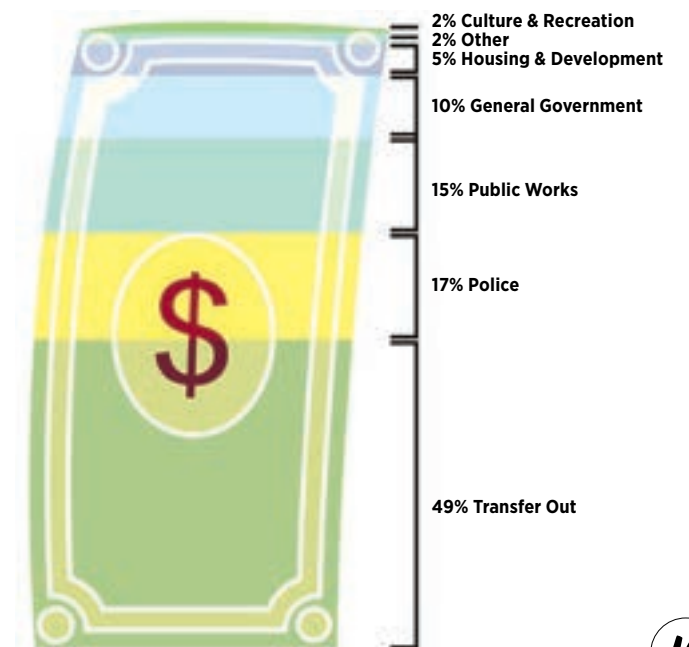
- 61% Net investment in capital assets**
 The most significant portion of net position (\$74.6 million) is invested in capital assets. Suwanee uses these capital assets to provide a variety of services to its residents. Examples would include roads, sidewalks, buildings, parks, vehicles, and large equipment.
- 16% Restricted/Nonspendable**
 \$19.4 million of net position is restricted and represents funds that are limited to specific activities by law, funding for construction activities, and payment of debt.
- 23% Unrestricted**
 The remaining portion of net position (\$29.0 million) is unrestricted and represents resources that are available for services.

Adopted Fiscal Year 2024 General Fund Budget Highlights

- 1% increase in operating revenues as compared to fiscal year 2023 final budget.
- The budget is balanced without using any budgeted fund balance.
- Property tax revenues are anticipated to increase by less than 1%.
- 8% increase in operating expenditures as compared to fiscal year 2023 final budget.

General Information

- 120 full-time and 12 part-time employees.
- Current millage is 4.93
- Current fund balance is \$9.5 million



Where Did the Money Go?

Total General Fund expenditures for fiscal year 2023 were \$17.1 million: 17% for Police services, 15% for Public Works, and 10% for general government. The largest expenditure was \$8.4 million (49%) for transfer out. This is due to operating expenditures for salaries and benefits being paid for with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. The operating amounts paid for using ARPA allowed the general fund to transfer the funds needed to complete the Town Center on Main Park project.

AWARDS

- **Metro Atlanta Redevelopment Summit – Small Redevelopment Project of the Year** | Station Park & StillFire Brewing, Partnership Gwinnett and Council for Quality Growth
- **Voice of the People Award – Excellence in Safety** | Suwanee Police Department, International City/County Management Association and Polco
- **Downtown Excellence Award - Creative New Event** | The Ultimate Participation Trophy, Georgia Downtown Association
- **Downtown Excellence Award - Best Public Improvement Project** | The Better Buford Highway Project, Georgia Downtown Association
- **City of Civility** | Designated by Georgia Municipal Association
- **Best Event Video (gold)** | Suwanee Running Series, Southeast Festivals & Events Association
- **Best Photo Opp (gold)** | Suwanee American Craft Beer Fest, Southeast Festivals & Events Association
- **Best Photo (silver)** | Glow in the Park + Atlanta International Night Market, Southeast Festivals & Events Association
- **Best Event Over \$75,000 (bronze)** | Suwanee Fest 2022, Southeast Festivals & Events Association
- **Best Children's Event (bronze)** | Suwanee Fest 2022, Southeast Festivals & Events Association
- **Best U.S. Suburbs for City-Like Living (#6)** | StorageCafe
- **Building Official of the Year** | Joe Alexander, Building Officials Association of Georgia
- **Dependable Safety Committee of the Year** | City of Suwanee Safety Committee, Apex Insurance
- **First Place** | City of Suwanee, Cigna City Health Challenge



I often ask myself why?

Because this has all led to the continuation of an evolving community. Because we can always grow. Because we can learn from each other's ideas. Because with passion and drive this vibrant community will thrive for generations.

Why?

Because we can. Because it's on us. Because we are Suwanee. And that is something to take pride in.

THE CITY OF SUWANEE 2023 ANNUAL REPORT WAS
INSPIRED BY THE CHILDREN'S BOOK *WHY*,
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