

2015

Forsyth County  
Annual Report



# Forsyth County Government

## Mission

As trusted stewards of Forsyth County's future, the elected officials and employees are dedicated to serving the community and to providing effective, professional public service with integrity and a commitment to excellence.

## Vision

Forsyth County is committed to providing and maintaining the most efficient, customer service-oriented county government possible. The county will be an innovative and strategic leader in providing essential and effective public services in a fiscally prudent and professional manner. By preserving and enhancing a high quality of life, Forsyth County will remain a healthy, safe and compelling place in which to live, work, recreate, visit and invest.

### Forsyth County

**Date of Incorporation**  
December 3, 1832

**Form of Government**  
Commission-County Manager

**Total Area in Square Miles**  
247

**2015 Population Estimate\***  
212,438

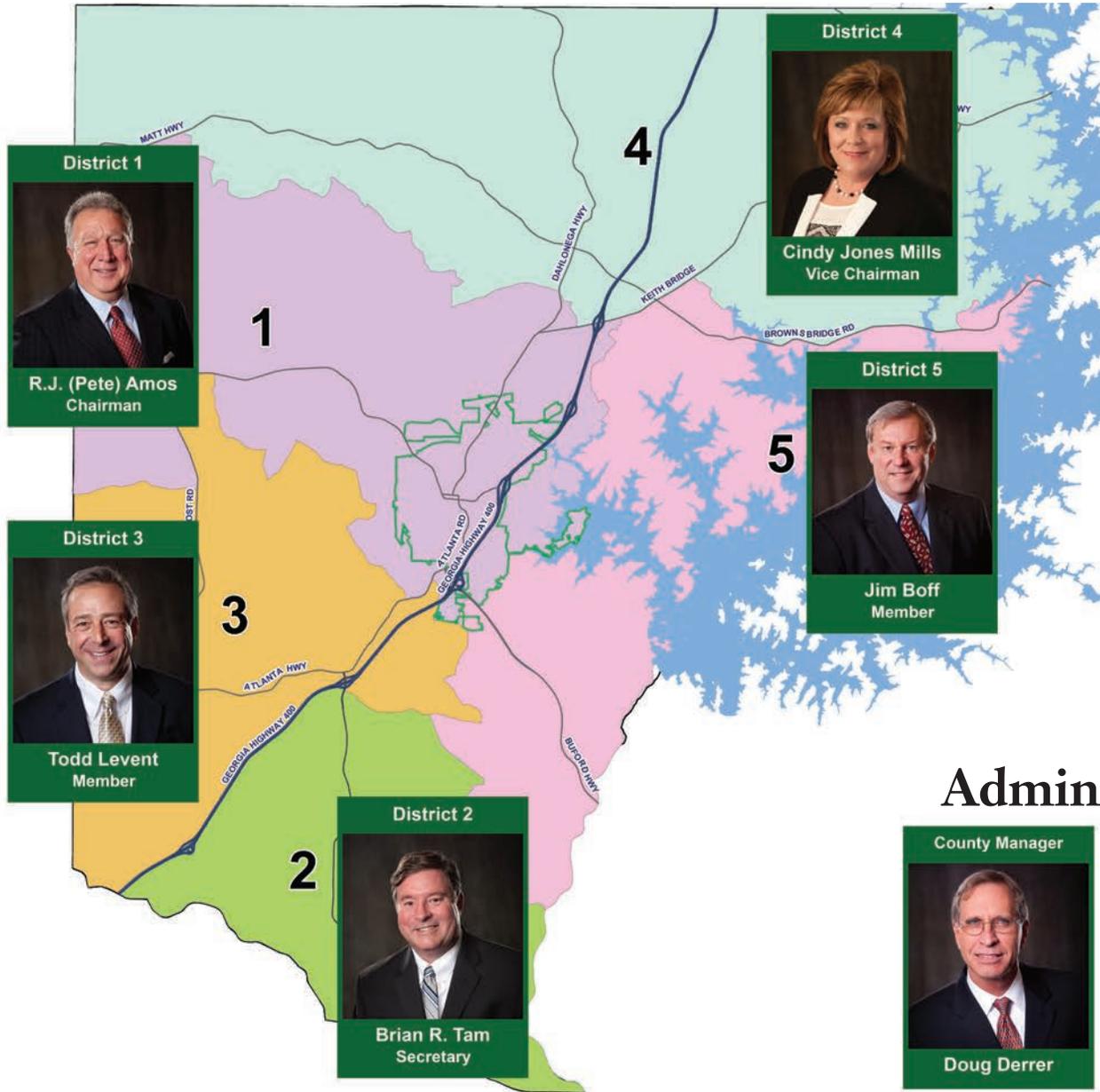
**County Government Employees  
as of December 31, 2015**  
1,286 Full-time  
257 Part-time/Seasonal

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau



On August 20, 2015, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners adopted a new county logo and a county tag line, highlighting the county's outstanding natural resources and quality of life. Both were part of a branding initiative that included community input via an online survey. The new county logo replaced one that had been adopted in 1986.

# 2016 Board of Commissioners



The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners is made up of five members, each living in a specific district and elected by district to serve four-year terms. Each January, the five members elect officers for the coming year.

The mission of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners is to exercise the powers, duties and responsibilities vested in and imposed upon it as the duly constituted governing authority of Forsyth County.

The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners meets in regular session twice a month, on the first and third Thursdays. The board also holds a work session twice a month, on the second and fourth Tuesdays. The meetings are held in the County Administration Building. The meetings are open to the public, and they also can be viewed on TV Forsyth (Comcast channel 23 and AT&T channel 99) and online at [forsythco.com](http://forsythco.com).

Forsyth County operates under the commission-county manager form of government.

## Administration



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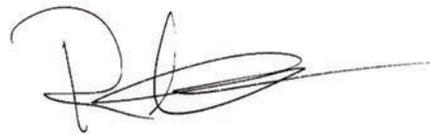
## Message from the Chairman

It is with great pride that we present the 2015 Forsyth County Annual Report, which offers an overview of some of the recent major projects and milestones in our county. Again this year, there is certainly no shortage of positive things taking place in our community.

Forsyth County continues to be financially stable and strong. We continue to make investments in our county's future by addressing important infrastructure improvement projects. Chief among those is the work being done on and planned for the county's roads. Last year ground was broken on a project that will add an additional lane in each direction of GA 400 from McFarland Parkway to Highway 369. This and other transportation projects are possible thanks to voter approval of the 2014 Transportation Bond. Working with the Georgia Department of Transportation and leveraging both state and federal funds, we will continue to move forward on bond-funded projects designed to improve your daily commute and enhance your quality of life.

It is a privilege to serve the citizens of this amazing community.

Sincerely,



R.J. (Pete) Amos  
2016 Chairman and District 1 Commissioner



# Message from the County Manager



Efficient, effective and professional. These words embody the manner in which Forsyth County government strives to serve you each and every day.

It is the county's mission to be an innovative and strategic leader in providing essential and effective public services in a fiscally prudent and professional manner. The county government staff realizes that the services we provide – from answering a 911 call or responding to a fire to paving a roadway or maintaining the athletic fields at our many county parks – are services that impact your life and the future of our great community. We take this role very seriously and are focused on customer service in all that we do.

Thank you for reading the 2015 Forsyth County Annual Report, which will provide insight into how your county government is run and will highlight some of the major accomplishments from the past year. Whether you are already very familiar with the county's operations or are visiting a county facility for the first time, we look forward to the opportunity to serve you.

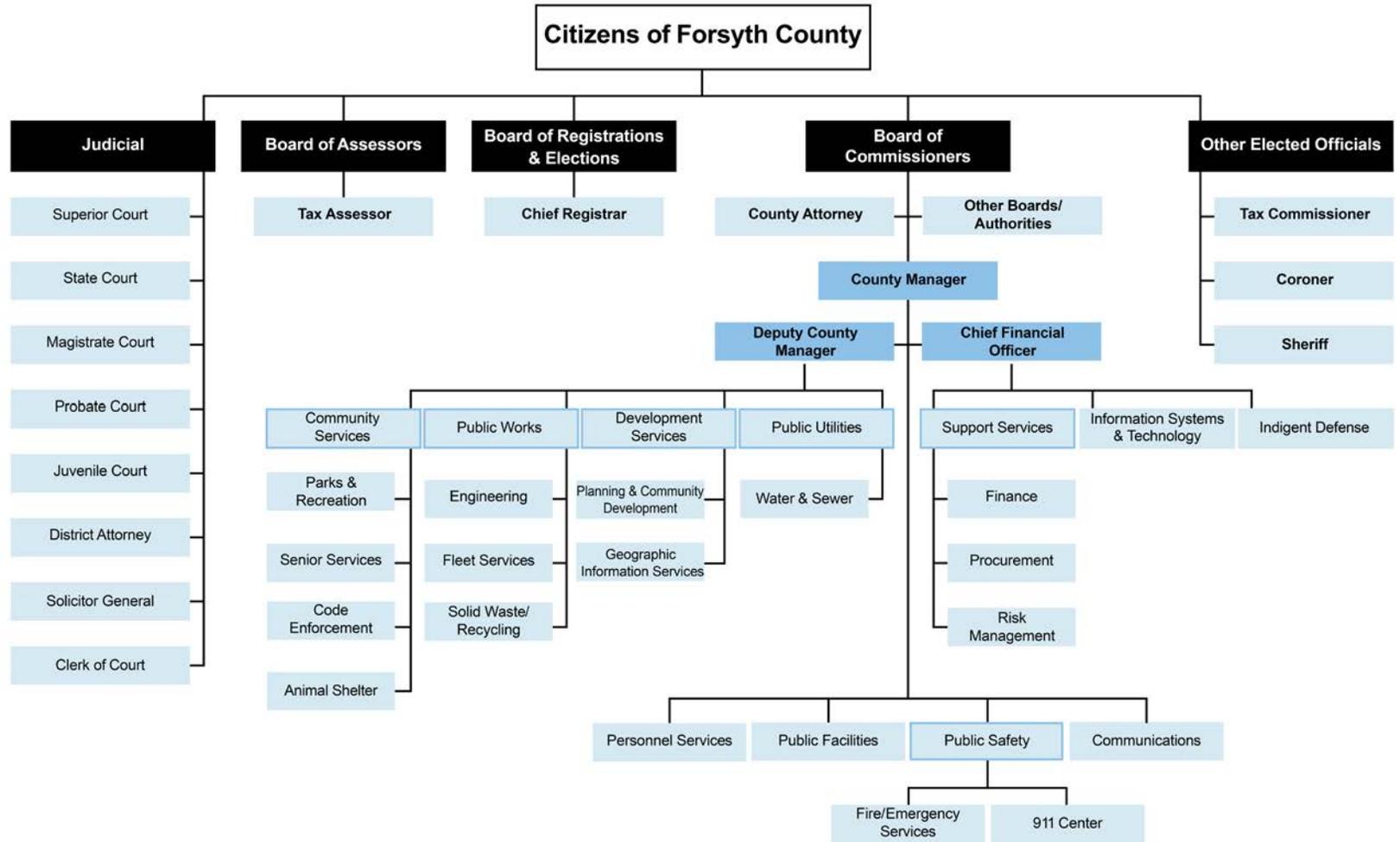
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Derrer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Doug Derrer  
County Manager

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# Forsyth County Organizational Chart



## New Forsyth County Courthouse and Jail Open

Forsyth County's new courthouse and jail both opened in 2015. Construction of the new facilities in downtown Cumming was funded by the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VII program approved by Forsyth County voters in November 2011. The new courthouse is approximately 158,000 total square feet and houses Superior Court, State Court, Solicitor-General, District Attorney, Clerk of Courts, Court Administration, Pre-Trial Services, Accountability Courts and Indigent Defense. The new jail is approximately 177,000 square feet and includes three inmate levels plus a support level. The jail and courthouse are connected via a bridge to allow for the secure transport of inmates to court. Both buildings included enhanced security systems and overall improved efficiency.



### Time Capsule Interred

In May, officials interred and sealed a time capsule in the new courthouse and ceremoniously placed it behind the courthouse's cornerstone. Some of the items included in the time capsule were citizen accounts of past courthouses, printed photographs of present-day Forsyth County and the winning essays from an essay contest sponsored by the Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit and the Forsyth County Bar Association.



### Lady Justice Sculpture Unveiled

In November, a sculpture of Lady Justice was unveiled in front of the courthouse. The sculpture was designed by local artist Gregory Johnson and funded in part by a contribution from the Forsyth County Development Authority.



### Probate Court and Sheriff's Office Move into Courthouse Annex

Following renovations, the former courthouse opened in late 2015 as the Forsyth County Courthouse Annex, housing Probate Court and the Sheriff's Office Headquarters.

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## 911 Center Personnel Honored for Actions during Courthouse Shooting



In 2015, Forsyth County 911 Center “A” Shift personnel were honored as the 911 Center Team of the Year for the state of Georgia. The team received this honor for their dedication and professionalism demonstrated during a shooting event that occurred at the Forsyth County Courthouse in June 2014. The 911 Center personnel were commended for their alert and swift communication during the incident, which allowed law enforcement officers in the area to be on the scene within seconds and able to assist courthouse deputies with preventing the suspect from entering the courthouse.

## Forsyth County ISO Rating Improves

Forsyth County received an improved rating from the Insurance Services Office (ISO) in 2015, resulting in potential insurance savings for residents and businesses. ISO, an advisory organization for insurance companies, conducted a study that took into account three key areas of public safety: fire protection, E-911 service and water services.

After the study, the county’s ISO rating improved from a 5 to a 3 — with a lower number representing a better level of protection — for those living within five road miles of a fire station. For those residences and businesses that are beyond five road miles from a fire station, the new rating may not apply. Residents and business owners are encouraged to contact their insurance provider for specific information on how the rating change may impact their insurance.

Fire hydrant volume and pressure availability, call handling and efficiency for the 911 Center and fire response and equipment were factors in the improved rating.

# Ground Broken for Matt Community Park

Ground was broken in July for a new Forsyth County park, which will be located off of Wallace Tatum Road in the Matt area in northwest Forsyth County. The property for the new Matt Community Park at Settingdown Creek was acquired with funding from the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond approved by Forsyth County voters in 2008. Construction of Phase I of the park is being funded by both the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond and by Impact Fees. Phase I of the park will include four synthetic-turf rectangular fields, a walking trail, a playground, concession area, restrooms and a parks maintenance facility. It is slated for completion in 2016.



# Renovations Made to Sharon Springs Tag Office

The Sharon Springs branch of the Tax Commissioner's Office, which is located at 1950 Sharon Road inside Sharon Springs Park, underwent renovations in 2015. The project was focused on enhanced customer service and involved increasing the size of the lobby/waiting area as well as a redesign of the customer service counters. The remodeling provides additional seating while allowing for future growth and better management of customer flow.



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## Forsyth is Healthiest County in Georgia for Third Year in a Row

In 2015, Forsyth County was once again named the healthiest county in Georgia in the annual County Health Rankings by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute. Nearly every county in the nation is ranked on health outcomes (how healthy we are) and on health factors (how healthy we can be). For the third year in a row, Forsyth County was ranked the healthiest in Georgia!



## County Receives Reimbursement Funds Related to Ice Storm

In September, Forsyth County received reimbursement funds from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the county's response and recovery efforts following the February 2015 winter weather event. The funds received totaled \$219,645.70 and covered costs related to debris removal, emergency protective measures and damage to public buildings and vehicles.

Following the winter weather event, Forsyth County's Roads and Bridges Division worked to clear the storm debris that had fallen within the county right of way. A large part of the reimbursement received by the county was to cover the personnel and equipment expenses related to this debris removal.

## County Government is on Facebook



Forsyth County offered another way for residents to connect with their government, with the launch of the county's Facebook page in July. The page is updated regularly with information about county programs, activities and news.

Connect with Forsyth County today at:  
[Facebook.com/ForsythCountyGovernment](https://www.facebook.com/ForsythCountyGovernment)

## TV Forsyth Now Streaming Live Online

More people are now able to tune in and keep up with Forsyth County government. In August, Forsyth County launched 24/7 online streaming of TV Forsyth, the county's government-access television channel, on the county website. TV Forsyth broadcasts a variety of county meetings as well as original programming focused on informing residents about the county. In addition to streaming online, TV Forsyth is available on Comcast channel 23 and AT&T channel 99.

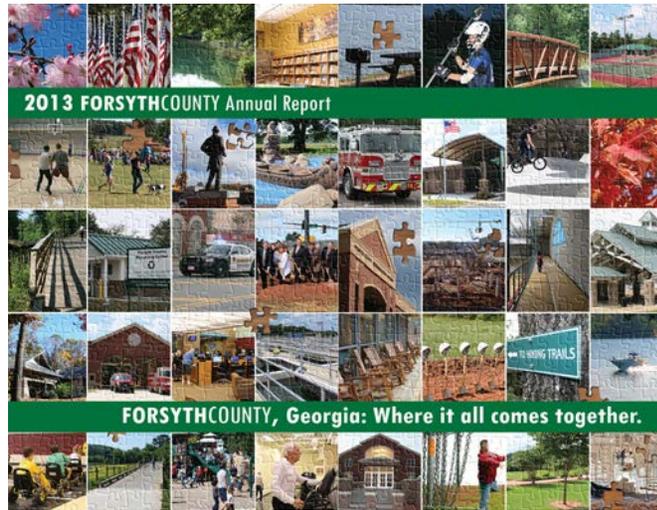


## Enhanced Forsyth County Government Website Launched

An enhanced Forsyth County government website – [www.forsythco.com](http://www.forsythco.com) – was rolled out in late 2015. Featuring a new look, a search function, and improvements to the site's layout and navigation, the new website was designed to foster better access to county information online. The enhancements to the website were completed in-house by the county's Information Systems and Technology Department staff.

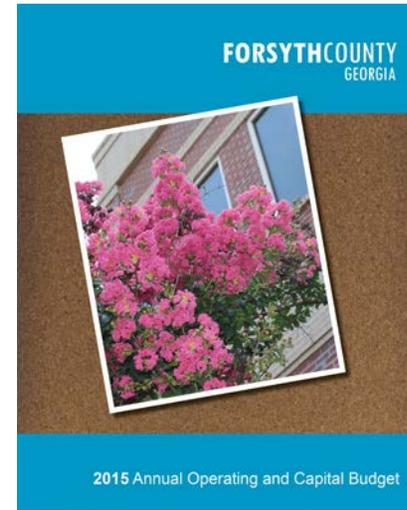


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## 2013 Annual Report Named 'Best in Class'

The 2013 Forsyth County Annual Report was recognized for excellence, through the National Association of County Information Officers' 2015 Awards of Excellence Competition. The publication was named 'Best in Class' in the competition's annual reports category.



## County Budget Book Earns Honors

The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada presented Forsyth County with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the county's 2015 budget book. This marked the third consecutive year the county received the award, which is the highest form of recognition in governmental budgeting and represents a significant achievement. The budget book is designed to serve as a policy document, as a financial plan, as an operations guide, and as a communications device, and can be viewed on the county website.

## Sheriff's Office Wins Highway Safety Award

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety recognized the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office in October, presenting them with the first-place award in the agency's size category. The Sheriff's Office was honored for the approach and effectiveness of their overall highway safety program.



## Project to Widen Georgia 400 Gets Underway

November 2015 saw the beginning of a milestone transportation project in Forsyth County – the widening of GA 400 from McFarland Parkway to Highway 369. One lane will be added in each direction along the 13.4-mile stretch, and the work is slated to be completed in mid-2018.

The project is being made possible through a partnership between Forsyth County and the Georgia Department of Transportation. GDOT contributed \$13 million to the work and is managing the project. The remainder of the project funding – approximately \$34.5 million – came from the Forsyth County Transportation Bond, approved by 63 percent of Forsyth County voters in 2014.

Earlier in the year, the county issued the first \$100 million of the Transportation Bonds. A portion of that went toward the GA 400 widening project, and the remaining portion will be used to have cash flow to move forward with all of the Bond projects based on a projected draw schedule. Thank you to the voters for their support of the Transportation Bond and making important transportation improvements possible!



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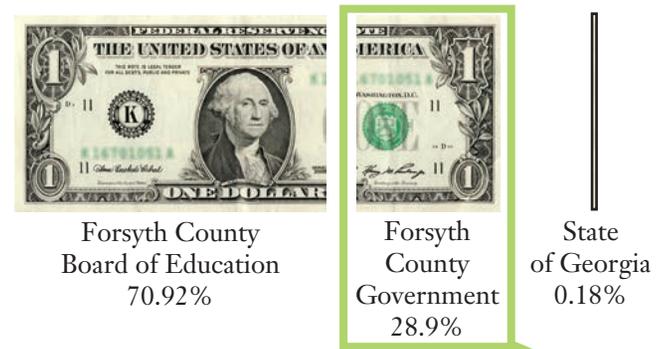
## How is the County Government Funded?

The four sources comprising the majority of the General Fund revenues are taxes, charges for services, fines and forfeitures, and licenses and permits. Revenue from **taxes** accounts for approximately 76.9% of the total revenue for the county's General Fund. This includes taxes from property, motor vehicles, cable television, alcohol excise, intangible property, real estate transfer tax, financial institutions and the local option sales tax (LOST). **Charges for services** revenue accounts for approximately 9.4% of the total revenue for the General Fund and includes such things as parks and recreational fees, judicial fees, sheriff and correctional fees, and sales of printed materials. **Fines and forfeitures** related to the courts and restitution account for 8.3% of the General Fund revenue. **Licenses and permits** revenue includes business licenses, a portion of motor vehicle tag fees, alcohol licenses and permits throughout unincorporated portions of the county, and accounts for nearly 1% of the General Fund revenue.

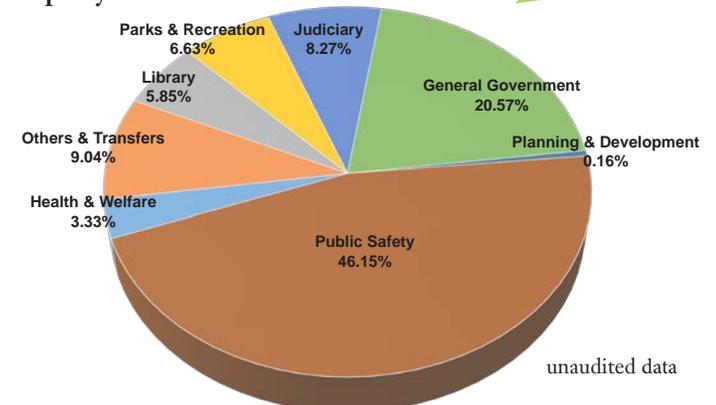
**Special revenue funds** are those not primarily supported by the General Fund, but rather by their own funding sources. These include the Fire Department, which is funded by a separate property tax, and the 911 Center, which is funded by land and wireless telephone charges. The Water and Sewer Department and the Recycling and Solid Waste Department are Enterprise Funds, which are those supported by user fees rather than by tax dollars. A few funds receive a General Fund subsidy. The Grant Fund includes General Fund matching funds for the Dial-A-Ride and Senior Services' meals programs.

## Where do your property taxes go?

Forsyth County government receives approximately 29% of the taxes you pay. The remainder goes to the school system and the state. This illustration shows how the average dollar is distributed among the various government agencies (note the percentages may vary depending on exemptions).



## FY 2015 General Fund County Property Tax Allocations



Property taxes received by the county are distributed among the county departments, agencies and services.

## Millage Rate

In 2015, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners adopted the rollback Maintenance and Operations millage rate of 4.642 and maintained the Fire millage rate of 1.975. This resulted in a combined rate of 6.617, a reduction from the previous rate. Compared to neighboring counties, Forsyth County continues to have one of the lowest millage rates.

### Millage Rate Comparison

(County Maintenance and Operations and Fire)

County	2015 Millage Rate
DeKalb	14.030
Gwinnett	10.429
Cobb	10.180
Cherokee	9.156
Hall	8.385
Dawson	8.138
<b>Forsyth</b>	<b>6.617</b>

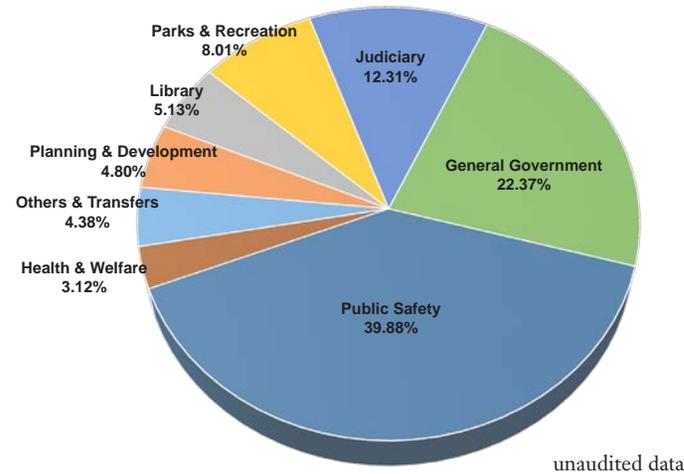
Source: Georgia Department of Revenue

## County Expenditures

In 2015, the adopted General Fund expenditure budget totaled \$103.4 million. General Fund expenditures in 2015 came in under budget, at approximately \$98.6 million.

Public safety (the sheriff, coroner and ambulance services) utilizes the largest portion of the General Fund, representing 39.9% of total expenditures in 2015. Other, non-public safety General Fund expenditures include judiciary, general government, parks and recreation, library, planning and development, and public health. These functions accounted for 55.7% of General Fund expenditures in 2015. The remaining expenditures are for the transfer of General Fund resources to other funds.

FY 2015 General Fund Expenditures



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## Penny Sales Tax Funds Capital Improvement Projects

Forsyth County's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, or SPLOST, is a voter-approved, one-percent sales tax that has been in effect in Forsyth County since 1983. For every dollar spent in Forsyth County, one penny goes into a fund devoted to certain, identified capital improvement projects. SPLOST programs have been approved by Forsyth County voters seven times since 1983, providing funding for infrastructure improvements and capital projects that otherwise may not have been possible.

The current SPLOST program, SPLOST VII, was approved by voters November 8, 2011. It went into effect July 1, 2013, and will expire June 30, 2019. Projections for the six-year program anticipate total collections of approximately \$200 million. Collections through December 31, 2015 totaled \$83.5 million.

County projects funded by SPLOST VII include a new courthouse, jail and related parking facilities, all of which opened in 2015. Also funded by SPLOST VII is a new animal shelter, which opened in 2014. Other projects slated to be completed with SPLOST VII funding include transportation projects, scheduled replacement of fire apparatus, an emergency raw-water generator, and expansion and repurposing of the Sharon Forks Library.



## County Maintains Exceptional Bond Rating

Forsyth County continues to have the highest bond rating possible from both Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service.

Standard & Poor's rating for the county is AAA with a stable outlook. The county's rating from Moody's Investors Service remains Aaa with a stable outlook. Forsyth is one of only three counties in Georgia with the Aaa rating from Moody's.

A number of factors contribute to the ratings, including the county's very strong economy, strong financial profile, management and good financial practices.

The exceptional ratings enable the county to bond important transportation, water and sewer, and public safety infrastructure improvements and projects at very low interest rates, allowing the county to more effectively plan and build for the future.

## Grants Fund County Programs and Services

Forsyth County was awarded 31 grants in 2015, totaling more than \$3.8 million. The county received grants from federal, state and private foundations for a variety of uses including law enforcement personnel, road improvements, emergency preparedness, disaster recovery, operations of Juvenile Court, Felony Drug Court and DUI Court, senior services, public transportation, criminal alien assistance and crime-victim assistance. Grant funding of \$1 million was secured from the Georgia Department of Transportation in 2015 for the widening of Castleberry Road.

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156,361  
calls handled by  
the Sheriff's Office

187,297  
recreation center  
pass visits

18,896  
trips provided by  
the Dial-A-Ride  
program, covering  
224,480  
miles driven

7,997  
campground  
reservations at  
Shady Grove  
Campground

222 dogs and  
220 cats  
adopted from the  
Forsyth County  
Animal Shelter

43,390  
meals delivered to  
home-bound  
seniors through the  
Meals on Wheels  
program, thanks to  
the assistance of  
volunteers

2,434,243  
print and digital  
eLibrary items were  
checked out by the  
more than

201  
county roads  
covering more than  
57  
miles resurfaced

648,000  
patrons who visited  
the county's  
4  
library branches

210,588  
calls handled by  
the 911 center

*13,283*

calls handled  
by the Fire Department

*2,305*

gallons of paint  
collected at Keep  
Forsyth County  
Beautiful's first  
ever paint  
recycling event

*5,387*

hours of Alzheimer's  
respite care provided  
through Senior Services'  
Sunshine Club

*3,025,320*

pounds of recyclables  
(including glass,  
paper, cardboard,  
steel cans, aluminum  
cans and plastics)  
collected at the  
county's three  
recycling  
convenience centers

*10,813*

hours given by volunteers,  
helping the Senior Services  
Department serve the  
county's seniors

*446*

child safety seat  
inspections conducted by  
the Fire Department to  
ensure proper installation

*2,049*

new water and sewer customers added, bringing the total  
of Forsyth County Water and Sewer customers in 2015 to

*54,951*

*969*

new business  
licenses issued

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2015

# Forsyth County Annual Report

Board of Commissioners

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Cumming, Georgia 30040

(770) 781-2101

[forsythco.com](http://forsythco.com)

TV Forsyth - Comcast Channel 23 and AT&T Channel 99