

2008 ANNUAL REPORT



a lifetime
of community

FORSYTH COUNTY, GEORGIA



The cover photograph shows the Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center. The Visitor Center opened in March 2008.

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.



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www.forsythco.com

FORSYTHCOUNTY Board of Commissioners

2008 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



District One
Charles Laughinghouse
Chairman



District Two
Brian R. Tam
Member



District Three
Jim Harrell
Secretary



District Four
David Richard
Vice Chairman



District Five
Dr. Linda K. Ledbetter
Member

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 Board of Commissioners is made up of five members, each living in a specific district and elected to serve four-year terms. Each January, the five members elect one of their own to serve as chairman of the board for the coming year. Forsyth County operates under the commission-county manager form of government.

The board meets in regular session twice a month, on the first and third Thursdays. The meetings begin at 5 p.m. in the Commissioners' Meeting Room on the second floor of the County Administration Building. The meetings are open to the public, and they also can be viewed on TV Forsyth on Comcast channel 23 and online at www.forsythco.com.

NEWLY ELECTED COMMISSIONERS FOR 2009



District Four
Patrick B. Bell



District Five
Jim Boff

Welcome to the newly elected Forsyth County commissioners for 2009. District 4 Commissioner Patrick B. Bell and District 5 Commissioner Jim Boff were elected in 2008, and took office January 1, 2009.

FORSYTHCOUNTY Administration



Doug Derrer
County Manager



William J. Thomas, CPA
Chief Financial Officer

Message from the Chairman

Without question, 2008 was a challenging year for Forsyth County. We, along with so many others across this great nation, faced uncertain economic times, the likes of which most of us have never before experienced. We were faced with making difficult decisions in order to trim the county's budget. Our **focus** throughout has been and will remain the continuation of **quality service** for our citizens.

Let us not forget, however, 2008 was also a year filled with **successful** projects and achievements. The Board of Commissioners adopted mission and vision statements for the county government. These statements are the means by which the Board of Commissioners can define the fundamental purpose, values and philosophy of Forsyth County government. The county established a Public Facilities Authority in 2008 to ensure much-needed **community projects** such as facilities, public safety improvements, parks and roads are delivered to Forsyth County citizens in the most timely and cost-effective manner possible. Forsyth County had smooth, successful elections in 2008, with a number of voters taking advantage of the early voting options. It was another great year in this **wonderful place** we call home.

On behalf of all Forsyth County officials and employees, **thank you** for the opportunity to serve you.



Charles Laughinghouse, Chairman



Message from the County Manager

It is with tremendous pride that we provide this annual report, outlining the **accomplishments** and **milestones** of Forsyth County from 2008. We hope that it is helpful in acquainting you with the projects, services and programs provided by your county government.

We are also proud to note Forsyth County's selection by Forbes as the second best place in America to get ahead. This recognition speaks volumes about the community as a whole and all of the wonderful **opportunities available** here.

With accolades such as this, it is no surprise Forsyth County remains one of the **fastest-growing** counties in the nation. This means we must continuously make improvements in our level of service to meet the increasing needs of a growing community. Your county government is committed to **quality service** and to making every experience you have with Forsyth County a positive one. We have a talented and professional staff ready and eager to serve you.



Doug Derrer, County Manager



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FORSYTHCOUNTY: A Great Place to Get Ahead

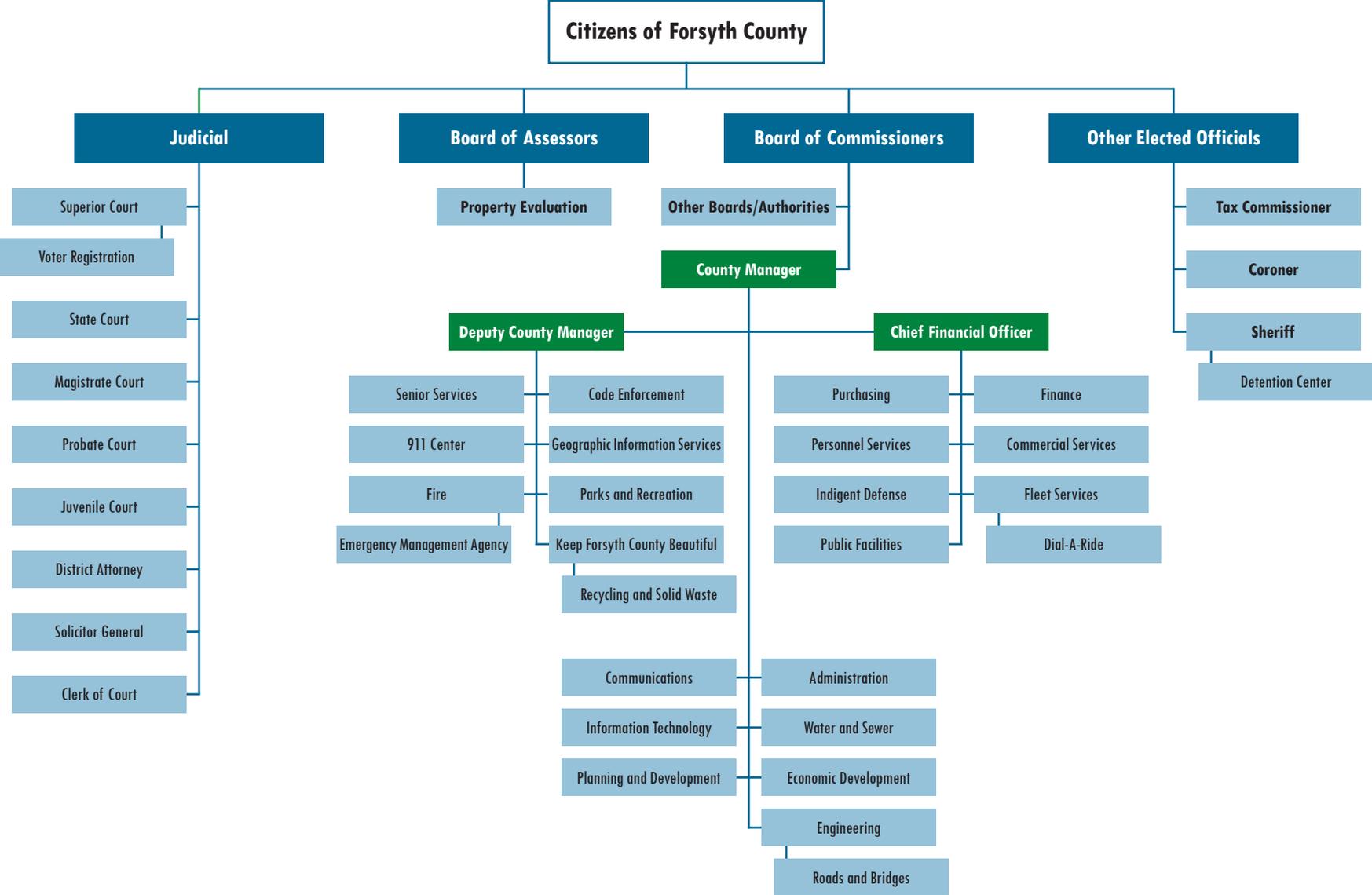
What defines a great community?

In Forsyth County, it is a **parks and recreation system** boasting over 1,700 acres and offering everything from baseball and soccer to disc golf and rock climbing. It is **tax rates** among the lowest in the metro Atlanta area. Community is a **convenient location** between Atlanta and the beautiful north Georgia mountains. It is a great place to call home. And Forbes agrees — in 2008, they named Forsyth County the second best place in America to get ahead.



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FORSYTHCOUNTY Organizational Chart



2008-in-Review

a *lifetime* of protecting



Public safety remained a priority in Forsyth County in 2008. New North and South Precincts of the Sheriff's Office opened in early 2008. Both the North Precinct, located in Central Park, and the South Precinct, located near the campus of South Forsyth High School, provide improved space for Sheriff's Office personnel to more efficiently conduct office activities.

The Fire Department reached a significant milestone in 2008, commemorating the tenth anniversary of Forsyth County's first full-time, career firefighters who were hired in the spring of 1998. Many of the original 30 full-time, career firefighters remain with the Forsyth County Fire Department today, and a number have advanced within the Fire Department to officer roles.

An Insurance Services Office (ISO) study was conducted in both Forsyth County and the city of Cumming in August 2008. This study audited the county's ability to serve the public through an examination of three key areas of public safety. Fire protection, E-911 service and water services were studied in a two-week exhaustive analysis, so as to appropriately define the ISO rating for Forsyth County residents and business owners. A lower ISO score could result in improved insurance

rates for Forsyth County citizens. An ISO study was previously conducted in Forsyth County in 1996.

The Forsyth County Fire Department, Senior Services Department and Kroger Pharmacy joined forces in 2008 to provide a valuable and potentially life-saving program available to all residents, but particularly targeted toward senior citizens. The Vial of Life initiative, launched in June 2008, was created to help provide vital information for first responders. Citizens complete the medical background information sheet and place the sheet in the provided and easily identified medical vial. The vial is then placed in the refrigerator door for easy finding by first responders. An alert sticker is also provided for placement on or near the front door.

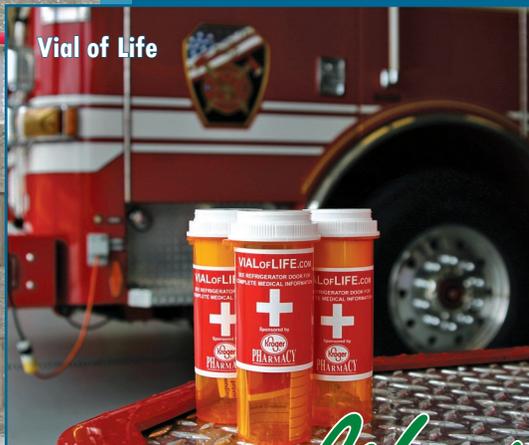
Forsyth County Emergency Management Agency installed outdoor severe weather sirens (11 new and one replacement) in 2008. In the event Forsyth County is placed under a tornado warning, the sirens will be activated. The purchase of the sirens was approved by the Board of Commissioners in 2007, after which the planning, installing and testing took place. The severe weather sirens went in service in early 2009.

Protecting community

- Calls received by the 911 Center in 2008: **181,764**
- Alarms answered by the Fire Department in 2008: **11,075**
- Calls for service handled by the Sheriff's Office in 2008: **141,812**



Sheriff's Office North Precinct Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



Vial of Life

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Home-Delivered
Meal Program

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Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit Tenth Anniversary

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a lifetime of serving

Forsyth County continued its emphasis on serving the community in 2008. Residents in the northern part of the county will soon have a new library branch, thanks to the December 2008 groundbreaking for the new Hampton Park Library. Funding for the 23,000-square foot facility, located on Settingdown Road between Hampton Park Drive and Cross Roads Road, comes from SPLOST V, impact fees and a state of Georgia construction grant.

Forsyth County's recycling centers and programs were widely used again in 2008, collecting 4,491,963 pounds of materials. The electronics recycling event in November alone brought in a record-breaking 91,728 pounds of materials. In addition to the county's three recycling centers, Keep Forsyth County Beautiful is now able to provide recycling opportunities at special events throughout the county, thanks to a Department of Community Affairs' Away From Home Recycling Grant received in April 2008. This grant package included a trailer, 100 recycling containers and all materials needed to provide recycling at various events.

The county's Dial-A-Ride program continued to grow, providing over 18,000 trips in 2008. Dial-A-Ride provides on-call transportation to Forsyth County residents for things such as medical appointments, shopping, employment, education and personal errands. The Fleet Services Department operates Dial-A-Ride.

In 2008, Forsyth County continued its commitment to serving the community's seniors. Programming started at the new Hearthstone Lodge Community Center, which opened in December 2007. The Hearthstone Lodge offers aquatic and fitness classes, provides a meeting place for clubs and groups, and focuses on fitness and fun for active adults age 50+.

The home-delivered meal program through Senior Services provided more than 46,000 meals in 2008 to home-bound senior citizens in the community. The county's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Department worked with Senior Services to streamline and enhance efficiency of the meal delivery program. Data collected by GIS led to average weekly savings of 15 hours and 559 miles.

Serving community

- Phone books recycled by schools during the annual phone book recycling contest in 2008: **9,674**
- Passenger miles driven by Dial-A-Ride in 2008: **225,713**
- Cases reviewed by Code Enforcement in 2008: **2,482**

In 2008, Senior Services expanded the Sunshine Club Alzheimer's Respite Program from three days per week to five days. The Sunshine Club provides an environment of comfort, enjoyment and safety for Alzheimer's patients while providing their caregivers with an often much-needed reprieve. Sunshine Club members participate in activities such as music, arts and crafts, exercise and stimulating games.

July 1, 2008 marked the tenth anniversary of the Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit. A special event was held in front of the Forsyth County Courthouse to commemorate this milestone. In 1998, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 77, creating the Bell-Forsyth Judicial Circuit.





Transportation improvements remained a focus for Forsyth County in 2008. Motorists can now travel on Market Place Boulevard from Buford Dam Road to Bald Ridge Marina Road, thanks to the new Market Place Boulevard Extension. This project was funded by SPLOST V along with state funds from the Georgia Department of Transportation. This four-lane roadway provides an alternative to GA 400 and State Route 9 for motorists traveling north-south. Construction of Ronald Reagan Boulevard from McGinnis Ferry Road to McFarland Boulevard started September 2008 and is slated for completion in the fall of 2009. Once this road opens to traffic, the county will have over 60 signalized intersections maintained and timed by the Department of Engineering.

Sixty-six parking spaces were added at the downtown County Administration Building in April 2008. This work was completed by the county's Public Facilities and Roads and Bridges staff.

The Water and Sewer Department added 630 new accounts in 2008, bringing the total number of customers served to 43,286. A combination of county projects and new development added 12 miles of new water mains, 118 new fire hydrants,

21 miles of new sanitary sewer mains and 535 new sewer manholes. This brings the total system infrastructure to 877 miles of water main, 6,534 fire hydrants, 383 miles of sanitary sewer main and 9,911 sewer manholes. The county completed its first raw water storage project in 2008. The new 20-million gallon open tank provides emergency storage and allows for increased flexibility in operation of the county's Water Treatment Plant. The county also began construction of a new 5-million gallon finished water ground storage tank and pumping station. When put into operation, the county will have a total finished water storage capacity of 19 million gallons. Forsyth County continued to expand its reuse water system in 2008, by making reuse irrigation water available to The Avenue Forsyth. This assisted the large mixed-used development in meeting their landscaping irrigation needs.

Planning and Development staff worked with the Board of Commissioners on changes to the Unified Development Code including modifications to exterior lighting regulations and requirements for heliports, as well as the adoption of the Ronald Reagan/Union Hill Overlay District. The staff also worked with the Board of Commissioners on two minor amendments of the future land use map within the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, drafts of the partial update to the Comprehensive Plan were presented at public hearings. The partial update will be reviewed by the state and approved in 2009 to maintain the county's qualified local government status. In 2008, Planning and Development staff successfully implemented code regulations pertaining to design overlay districts, large scale retail establishments and senior housing. The department also worked to boost efficiency and improve customer service through a variety of ways: publication of "Application Guide for Public Hearings", a comprehensive user guide assisting applicants in navigating the public hearing application process from pre-application through the board decision; update of all public hearing applications to PDF fillable and savable forms; and reorganization of department-related information on the county Web site, including making land development checklists available online.

Building community

- Miles of county roads resurfaced and deep patched in 2008: **73**
- Road shoulder miles mowed by Roads and Bridges staff in 2008: **3,475**
- Intersections improved in 2008: **12**
- New business licenses approved in 2008: **1,364**

a lifetime of recreating

The history and nature of Sawnee Mountain come to life in the Parks and Recreation Department's new Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center which opened in March 2008 as part of Phase II of the Preserve. The 5,600-square foot Visitor Center includes an exhibit hall highlighting the natural and cultural histories of the mountain, laboratory and classroom, resource library and native plant garden with a waterfall feature. Visitors can access Sawnee Mountain's hiking trails from the new center.

The new Miracle League Field at Coal Mountain Park, along with a handicapped-accessible playground and additional park improvements, opened in April 2008. The Miracle League Field offers adapted programs for physically and mentally challenged children and adults and includes a wheelchair-friendly field surface.

Construction began in 2008 for the Big Creek Greenway's first three phases, which are slated to open in August 2009. When all phases are complete, the 12-foot wide multi-use trail is planned to cover approximately 15 miles and eventually stretch north from McGinnis Ferry Road to Sawnee Mountain Preserve on Spot Road. The Engineering Department is overseeing the design and construction of the Greenway which, upon completion, will be managed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

Concession buildings at Midway and Sharon Springs Parks were renovated in 2008 by the Public Facilities Department. Improvements included the installation of maintenance-free windows, additional lighting and enhanced restroom facilities.

On February 5, 2008, Forsyth County voters signaled interest in having additional parks and green space, as they approved the issuance of a \$100 million Parks/Recreation and Green Space General Obligation Bond. The bond issue received overwhelming voter approval of 69-70% countywide. The bond's intent is for improvements and expansion to existing parks, purchase of land for future active recreation parks and acquisition of land for green space (passive recreation). In December 2008, Forsyth County acquired the first two properties to be utilized as green space using bond funds.

Forsyth County has 16 parks totaling 1,703 acres and serving approximately 950,000 visitors annually.



Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center



Miracle League Field and Handicapped-Accessible Playground

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Two of the county's communications tools were recognized for excellence in 2008 by the National Association of County Information Officers. The Forsyth County Fire Department 2006 Annual Report garnered a Meritorious award in the annual reports category and the original television series "Forsyth in Focus" was named Best in Class for all audiovisual productions. "Forsyth in Focus" spotlights news and information about the county, and airs on TV Forsyth, Comcast channel 23.



The Sawnee Mountain Preserve Visitor Center won the Georgia Urban Forest Council's Outstanding New Development – Grand Award in 2008 for recognition of the facility's preservation and planting of trees.

Keep Forsyth County Beautiful received the 2008 President's Circle Recognition Award from Keep America Beautiful. This annual award is presented to affiliates meeting all Keep America Beautiful requirements.

The Senior Services' Kudzu Junction program garnered the Innovative Award Program 2008, Senior Adult Section from the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association. Kudzu Junction is an educational travel program for new Forsyth County residents age 50+, helping to familiarize them with the area.



Forsyth County's Manor Water Reclamation Facility was a winner of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2008 Regional Clean Water Act Recognition Award. This water facility won first place regionally and nationally for its operations and maintenance in the small non-discharging plant subcategory. The water facility was recognized for its outstanding compliance record, effective automation system, proactive maintenance and commitment to protecting the environment and community.

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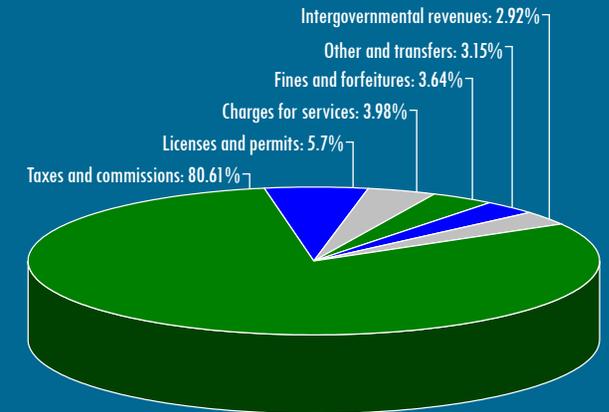
Financial Outlook

Fiscal sustainability is one of Forsyth County's primary goals. Throughout 2008, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners continued to embark on a journey to strengthen the county's financial position and build a strong foundation for the future.

Signs that the national and local economies were declining began to appear as early as March 2008. Sales tax revenues, a resource funding approximately 28% of the county's General Fund, began to show signs of weakness with the March receipts. In April, it was forecasted the General Fund would fall almost \$7 million short in revenues (6.8% decline from original estimates). The estimated shortfall increased to \$14 million (13.6% decline from original estimates) by September. Based on these forecasts, the Board of Commissioners reduced the General Fund budget from \$103 million to \$91 million by instituting cost-saving measures and implementing a hiring freeze for vacant positions.

As a result of the economic conditions, Forsyth County did not experience growth in revenues for the first time in years. Revenue growth in previous years was the engine that allowed the county to increase service levels to its citizens. Forsyth County ended 2008 using over \$6.5 million of reserves to meet operating costs.

- Taxes and commissions: \$70.42 million
- Licenses and permits: \$4.98 million
- Charges for services: \$3.48 million
- Fines and forfeitures: \$3.18 million
- Intergovernmental revenues: \$2.55 million
- Other and transfers: \$2.75 million



FY 2008 General Fund Revenues

General Fund

Forsyth County provides the majority of its services through the use of General Fund resources. The General Fund supports the general administration of the county. The Fire Department is funded by a separate property tax, and the 911 Center is funded by land and wireless telephone charges.

Public Safety Expenditures

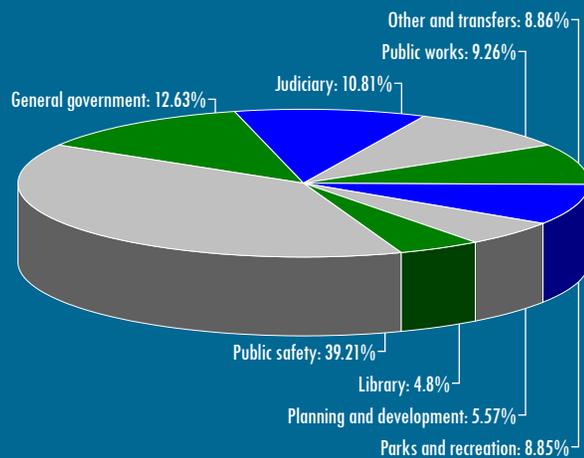
Public safety (the sheriff, coroner and ambulance services) utilizes the largest part of the General Fund, representing 39.21% of total expenditures in 2008.

Other General Fund Expenditures

Other, non-public safety General Fund expenditures include judiciary, public works, general government, parks and recreation, planning and development, library and public health. These functions accounted for \$51,622,438 in expenditures (or 55%) of the General Fund expenditures. The remaining expenditures are for the transfer of General Fund resources for use by other funds. In 2008, these included the following transfers:

- \$2.56 million transferred to the vehicle fund to purchase vehicles and equipment
- \$2.48 million transferred to the capital projects fund
- \$415,000 transferred to victims rights, solid waste, Keep Forsyth County Beautiful and the internal service fund

Overall, the General Fund expenditures including transfers out and one-time payments were \$93.897 million. This was \$1.388 million (or 1.45%) less than 2007 expenditures.



FY 2008 General Fund Expenditures

SPLOST

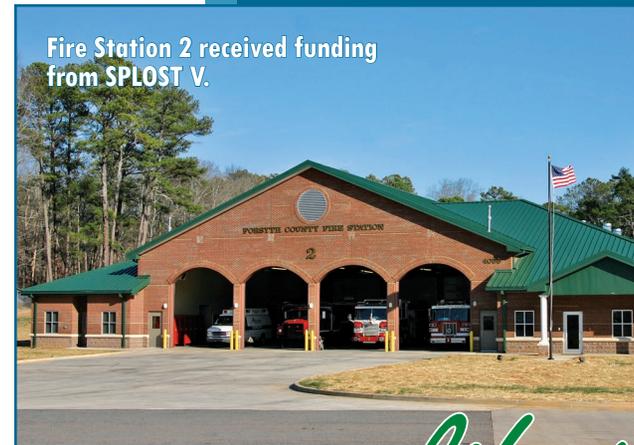
Forsyth County's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is a one-percent sales tax approved by Forsyth County citizens. This tax has provided funding for new capital projects and infrastructure improvements that otherwise may not have been possible.

SPLOST V was approved by voters March 18, 2003, expired June 30, 2008, and generated \$141,676,470 in sales tax receipts. The county was able to leverage these funds to receive an additional \$26,291,813 through interest earnings, grants and reimbursements. This allowed for a total of \$167,968,283 to go toward funding new Fire Stations 1 and 2, the Coal Mountain Park and Midway Park Community Buildings, 911 public safety radio system upgrade, six fire engines and a number of other projects.

SPLOST was reauthorized by county voters in February 2008 for an additional five years, running through June 2013.

SPLOST VI total collections are projected to be \$160 million over the five-year authorization. These funds are committed to the following proposed projects:

- Transportation related projects: \$108.6 million
- Construction of new or replacement fire stations: \$16.96 million
- Park and recreation improvements: \$13.5 million
- Construction of a new library on Post Road: \$7.2 million
- Senior center: \$5 million
- Community meeting facility: \$1 million
- Fire truck replacement: \$825,000
- City of Cumming: 4.29% of collections



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Bond Rating

County voters approved a \$100 million Parks/Recreation and Green Space General Obligation Bond in February 2008. As a result of this approval, Forsyth County entered a very tenuous bond market in November 2008 to issue \$83 million of these bonds. The bond sale was highly successful, even in light of market conditions, due to the credit quality of Forsyth County bonds. Forsyth County's bond rating had been upgraded in 2007 to Aa1 (Moody's) and AA+ (Standard and Poor's). These ratings were confirmed by both Moody's and Standard and Poor's for the November 2008 bonds.

Grants

Forsyth County received 30 grants in 2008, totaling \$1,164,775. The county received grants from federal, state and private foundations for a variety of uses including law enforcement personnel; Juvenile Court, Drug Court and DUI Court operations; senior services; public transportation; bullet proof vests; criminal alien assistance; cyber crime enforcement; crime victim assistance; a recreation trail; an environmental classroom/library; a public art festival; a preschool fire prevention program; and the county's recycling program.

Excellence in Financial Reporting

The county earned the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting in 2008 from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) that was issued for FY 2007. The award represents the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. Forsyth County has received this award each year since 2000.

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FORSYTHCOUNTY at a Glance

Date of Incorporation

December 3, 1832

Form of Government

Commission – County Manager

Total Area in Square Miles

247

2008 Population Estimate*

168,060

Historic Population*

1990: 44,083

2000: 98,407

2005: 140,393

Population Growth Ranking (April 1, 2000 – July 1, 2008 [percent])*

Sixth fastest-growing county in United States

County Government Employees in 2008

Total employees: 1,419

Full-time employees: 1,220

Part-time/seasonal employees: 199

* Source: U.S. Census Bureau



FORSYTHCOUNTY

110 E. Main St., Cumming, GA 30040

770.781.2101

www.forsythco.com

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This annual report was prepared by the Forsyth County Department of Communications.