

2014

FORSYTHCOUNTY ANNUAL REPORT



Where
excellence is
tradition

**FORSYTHCOUNTY****Date of Incorporation:**

December 3, 1832

Form of Government:

Commission-County Manager

Total Area in Square Miles:

247

2014 Population Estimate:

204,302*

County Government Employees in 2014:1,432 $\left(\begin{array}{l} 1,186 \text{ full-time} \\ 246 \text{ part-time or seasonal} \end{array} \right)$

* Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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.

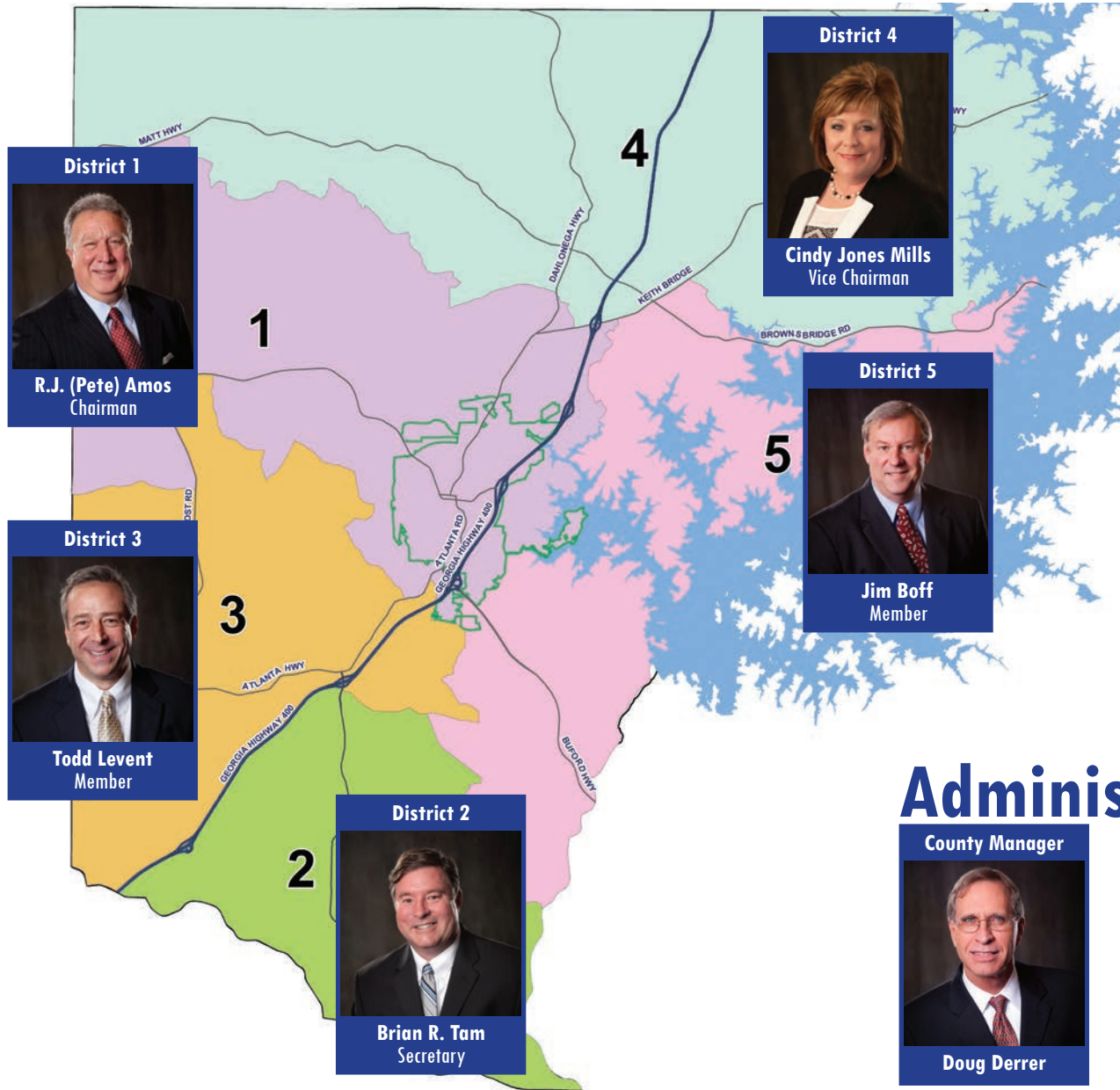
Vision

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.

Pictured on the Cover

**New Animal Shelter
opened in August****3 new fire engines
brought into service****Work continued on
new courthouse****New playground at
Central Park opened**

2015 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.

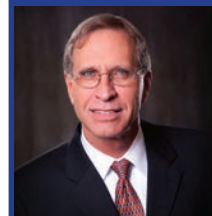
The mission of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners is to exercise the powers, duties and responsibilities vested in and imposed upon it as the duly constituted governing authority of Forsyth County.

The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners meets in regular session twice a month, on the first and third Thursdays. The meetings are held 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, AT&T channel 99 and online at www.forsythco.com.

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

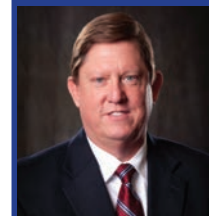
Administration

County Manager



Doug Derrer

Deputy County Manager



Tim Merritt

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'I am pleased to report that the county's financial condition remains strong and that the 2015 budget was funded with no increase in our millage rate.'

Message from the Chairman

Forsyth County is a community where positive things are taking place every day. In fact, excellence is all around us. From our top-notch public safety services and nationally recognized schools to beautiful neighborhoods and our outstanding parks system, there is no shortage of things our residents can be proud of.

As a county government, our focus is to build on and continue that excellence. This is evidenced by the county's operations. I am pleased to report that the county's financial condition remains strong and that the 2015 budget was funded with no increase in our millage rate. In fact, the county's portion of the total millage rate has remained the same for five consecutive years and our tax rates continue to be among the lowest in the metro Atlanta area.

Our citizens are also taking an active role in continuing the excellence for which Forsyth County is known. In November 2014, voters approved an up to \$200 million Transportation Bond to fund transportation projects throughout the county. Among the projects this bond will fund are the widening of a stretch of GA 400; an interchange on GA 400 at McGinnis Ferry Road; construction of two new sections of Ronald Reagan Boulevard; and a number of traffic safety improvements. The citizens' support of this bond measure will enable much-needed transportation projects to be completed and illustrates residents' efforts to continuously improve our community.

On behalf of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, I would like to say what an honor and privilege it is to serve the citizens of this great community.

Sincerely,



R.J. (Pete) Amos

2015 Chairman and District 1 Commissioner



Message from the County Manager



It is with a great sense of pride that Forsyth County presents this annual report, showcasing highlights, accomplishments and progress made in our community in 2014.

We hope this publication better acquaints you with your county government and the wide variety of services provided. Some of these services are highly visible, such as the crews making improvements to the roadways and the firefighters responding to emergencies. Others are more behind the scenes, such as Finance Department employees processing invoices and staff members preparing the materials for the many meetings held by county boards and committees. Whatever their role, county employees work each day to provide these vital services in an effective and efficient manner. It is our goal to not only meet but hopefully exceed citizens' expectations.

With an award-winning parks and recreation system and first-rate services provided for our growing community, Forsyth County remains a destination where families want to live, work and play. Your county government is committed to continuously improving our level of service to make every experience you have with Forsyth County a positive one. Our continued success is vital to your future and to the future of your community.

Thank you for reading the 2014 Forsyth County Annual Report. We look forward to serving you soon.

Sincerely,

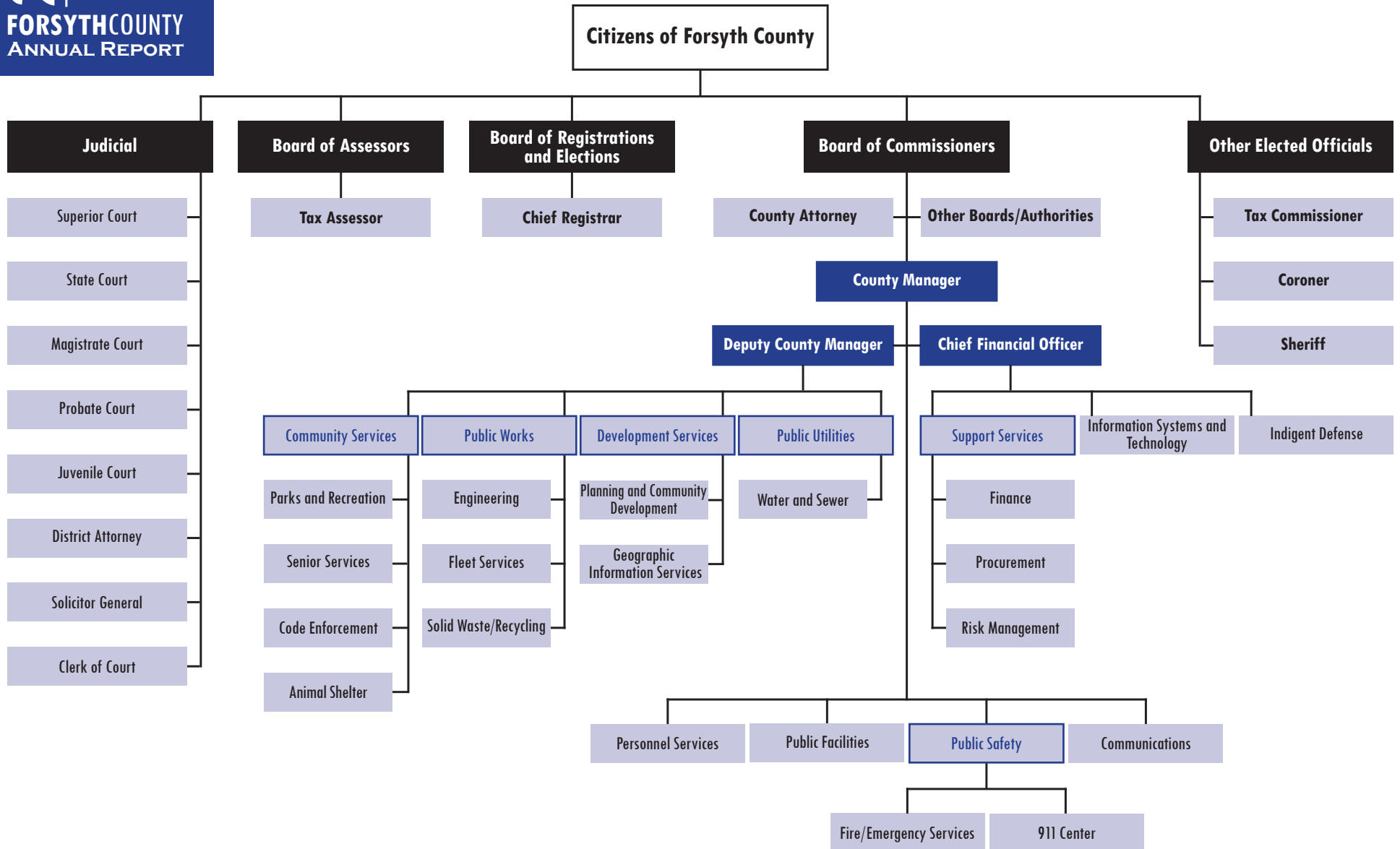
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Derrer', written in a cursive style.

Doug Derrer
County Manager

'Whatever their role, county employees work each day to provide these vital services in an effective and efficient manner.'

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FORSYTHCOUNTY Organizational Chart



County Recognized for Wellness, Fitness Initiative

During an event held January 16 at the Forsyth Conference Center at Lanier Technical College, Forsyth County government was one of 21 organizations recognized by Celebrate Healthy North Georgia. The event recognized the hard work of organizations who have implemented programs to

raise awareness and improve the health of residents of the 13 counties that make up District 2 Public Health. Forsyth County was recognized for both the outstanding fitness opportunities available through Parks and Recreation and the county's emphasis on the health and well-being of employees through initiatives such as the Employee Wellness Committee.



Drug Court Program Marks 10-Year Anniversary

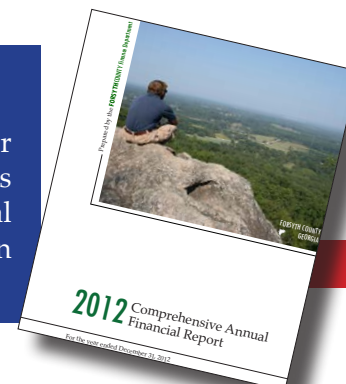
The Forsyth County Felony Drug Court celebrated its tenth anniversary with a special graduation ceremony January 17 at the Forsyth Conference Center at Lanier Technical College. The Forsyth County Drug Court was created with the intent to stop the revolving door of substance abuse and arrest by linking together drug-addicted offenders to drug treatment and judicial supervision. Instead of spending time in jail, eligible participants are provided the option to complete a substance abuse program supervised by Superior Court Chief Judge Jeffrey S. Bagley and monitored by a team of support staff, prosecutors, attorneys, probation officers, law enforcement and drug treatment providers. Several hundred drug offenders have graduated from the Drug Court since its inception.

Library Continues to Expand eLibrary Collection

The Forsyth County Public Library continued to expand its eLibrary collection in 2014 with the addition of hoopla, Flipster and Comics Plus. Hoopla is a digital service providing online and mobile access to thousands of movies, TV shows, videos, music and audiobooks. Flipster offers eMagazines for library patrons to use. Comics Plus is a service providing access to more than 5,500 comic books, manga, and graphic novels for younger readers ages five to 13.

Financial Documents Earn Honors

For the thirteenth consecutive year, Forsyth County was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA). The recognition was presented for the county's comprehensive annual financial report issued for Fiscal Year 2012. The county also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from GFOA for the county's 2014 budget book.



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Courts Begin Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. Program

In 2014, Forsyth County's Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. (Change, Assist, Restore and Enlighten) Program held its first court session to assist defendants with severe and persistent mental illness. The mission of the Mental Health Court C.A.R.E. Program is to provide an alternative to incarcerations for individuals who have been identified with severe and persistent mental health diagnoses by linking those individuals to local, community-based treatment resources with the goal of improving public safety and helping prevent further involvement in the criminal justice system.

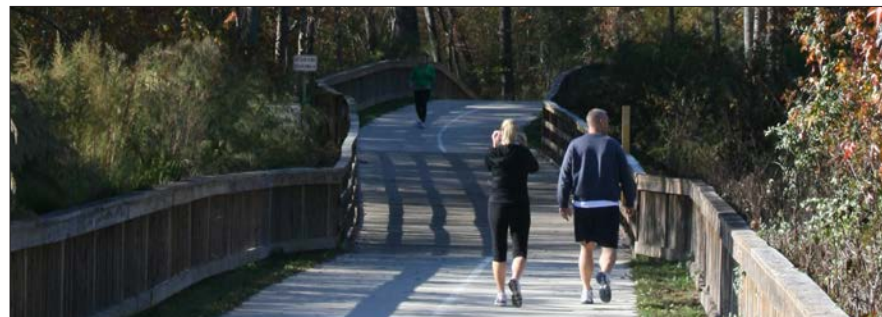


Fire Department Graduates Recruit Class

The Forsyth County Fire Department graduated its first recruit class of 2014 on April 18 in a ceremony held at the Forsyth County Central Park Recreation Center. The five members of the recruit class completed 14 weeks of comprehensive firefighter instruction and drills, ranging from structural fire control and reading smoke to vehicle extrication and hazardous materials awareness and operations.

County Named Healthiest in Georgia for Second Year in a Row

For the second year in a row, Forsyth County was 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 country is ranked on health outcomes (how healthy we are) and on health factors (how healthy we can be). For the second consecutive year, Forsyth County came out on top of the rankings!



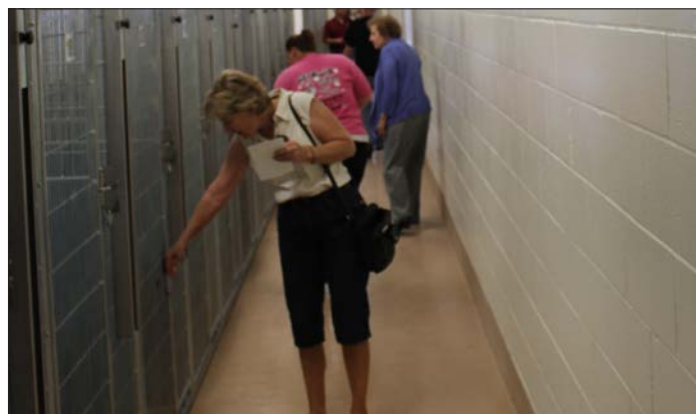
Special Needs Public Safety Program Launched

Individuals with special needs may encounter many situations involving public safety personnel, such as a police officer initiating a traffic stop, a firefighter responding to a house fire, or a paramedic administering assistance during a medical emergency. To a person with a disability, these situations could cause a flood of emotions and reactions that could be misinterpreted. In July 2014, a new program called S.N.A.P.S. (Special Needs Awareness of Public Safety) was launched, offering people with special needs and their caregivers an opportunity to meet public safety professionals in a relaxed environment, participate in scenarios, and become acquainted with public safety personnel.



New Animal Shelter Opens

On August 22, Forsyth County officially opened its new animal shelter. The new Forsyth County Animal Shelter is located just off of GA 400 at 4065 County Way in northern Forsyth County. Construction of the approximately 13,700-square foot facility was funded by the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VII program approved by voters in 2011. Prior to opening the new shelter, the county contracted out shelter operations.



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Government Cable Channel Expands

More people are now able to tune in and keep up with Forsyth County government via television, as TV Forsyth expanded to AT&T U-Verse. TV Forsyth is Forsyth County's 24-hour government cable channel and has been broadcast on Comcast channel 23 since late 2007. Starting in August 2014, TV Forsyth became available on AT&T U-Verse channel 99 as well. TV Forsyth broadcasts county meetings and original programming to help citizens stay informed about their county government.



Fire Department Puts New Engines into Service

The Forsyth County Fire Department put three new engines into service in August. Housed at Fire Stations 1, 10 and 12, the new engines will help boost departmental efficiency and enhance the safety of personnel. The new units replaced aging engines which are now a part of the department's reserve fleet.

Fire Department Hosts Inaugural Session of New Citizens' Fire Academy

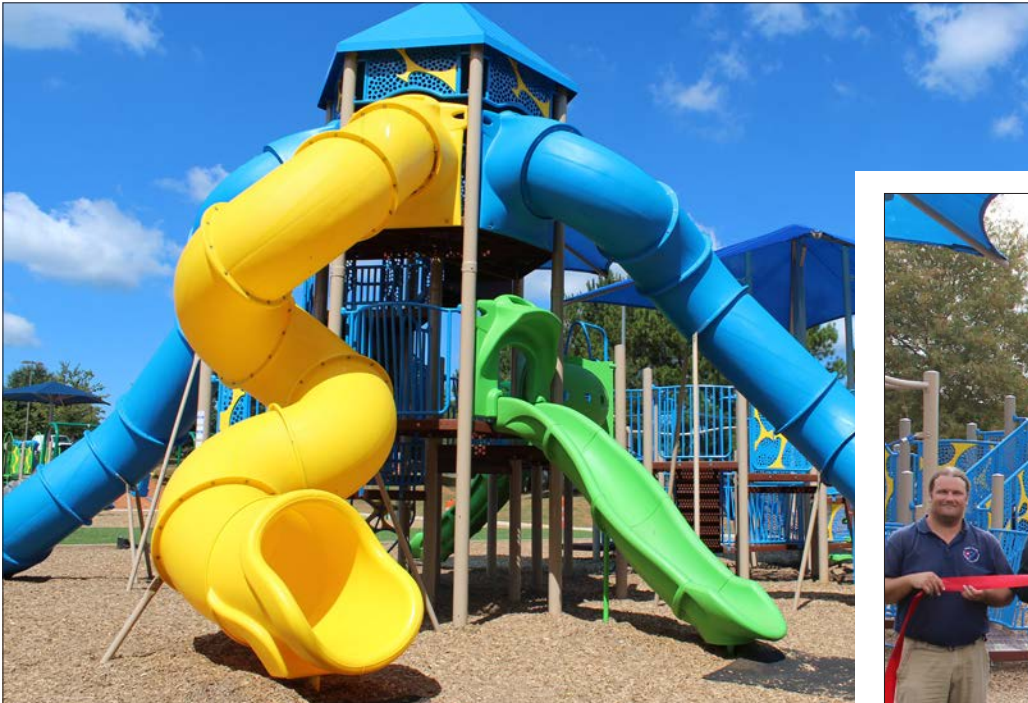
In September, the Forsyth County Fire Department invited citizens interested in learning more about Forsyth County's fire and emergency services to sign up for a free 10-week Citizens' Fire Academy. Participants in the new program learned about the variety of services offered by the fire department, learned about fire and firefighting equipment, and interacted with first responders, gaining an inside look into the profession of firefighters.



Voters Approve Transportation Bond

In November, voters approved an up to \$200 million general obligation bond to finance a variety of transportation projects. Of the up to \$200 million, \$81 million is proposed for projects in partnership with the Georgia Department of Transportation, leveraging state and federal funding, with the remaining \$119 million proposed for county projects.

TRANSPORTATION BOND



New Playground Opens at Central Park

Visitors to Central Park now have a new place to play, thanks to a new playground that opened in 2014. It features a tot-lot area for ages two to five and an area for ages five to 12. Children can use slides, climbers, swings and more all built out of metal and plastic, compared to the old playground which was a wood structure. The old playground was replaced due to wear and tear, and the inability to obtain parts for repair. The new playground was funded by the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond approved by voters in 2008.



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Construction Continues on New Courthouse and Jail

Throughout 2014, construction of Forsyth County's new courthouse and jail in downtown Cumming continued. The new facilities are funded by the voter-approved Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VII sales tax program. The new courthouse opened in March 2015.





Above: The Castleberry Parking Facility
Right: The Mason Street Parking Facility



New Parking Facilities Open

In 2014, two new parking decks opened for the public to use in downtown Cumming. The new three-level Castleberry Parking Facility located at Castleberry Road and Maple Street opened over the summer. The new five-level Mason Street Parking Facility near the Forsyth County Administration Building opened in December. Both decks are a part of the new courthouse and jail project, funded by the SPLOST VII sales tax program.



Fire Department Presents Awards, including Three Medals of Honor, and Graduates Recruit and EMT Classes

In a ceremony held December 12, the Forsyth County Fire Department presented a number of awards to personnel. Family, friends and Fire Department staff attended the ceremony, which was held in the auditorium at North Forsyth High School. The Fire Department presented 39 Life Saved and 16 Unit Citation awards to personnel in recognition of outstanding actions over the past several years. Three personnel received the Medal of Honor for a rescue from a burning home in December 2013. Tracy Boone, the person rescued from that fire, presented the awards to the recipients after addressing the crowd.

Also during the ceremony, the Forsyth County Fire Department promoted personnel, graduated its first ever in-house EMT class, and graduated its newest recruit class.

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FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

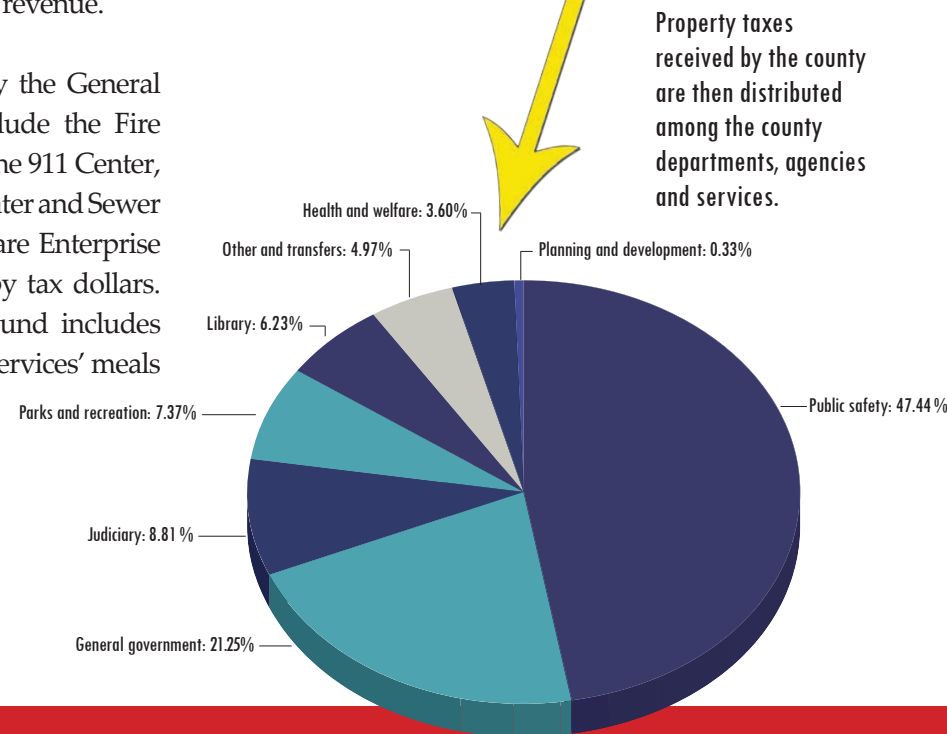
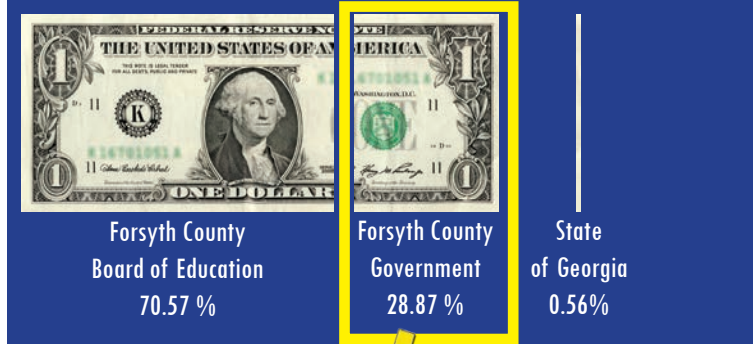
How is the County Government Funded?

The four sources comprising the majority of the General Fund revenues are taxes; charges for services; licenses and permits; and fines and forfeitures. Revenue from **taxes** accounts for approximately 81.6% 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 8.8% 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. **Licenses and permits** revenue includes business licenses, motor vehicles, alcohol licenses and permits throughout unincorporated portions of the county, and accounts for nearly 6.1% of the General Fund revenue. **Fines and forfeitures** related to the courts and restitution account for 2.2% 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).



Millage Rate

Forsyth County's millage rate for Maintenance and Operations and Fire combined is 6.787. This rate has remained unchanged since 2011. 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	2014 Millage Rate
DeKalb	11.090
Gwinnett	10.600
Cobb	10.380
Cherokee	9.164
Hall	8.389
Dawson	8.138
Forsyth	6.787

Source: Georgia Department of Revenue

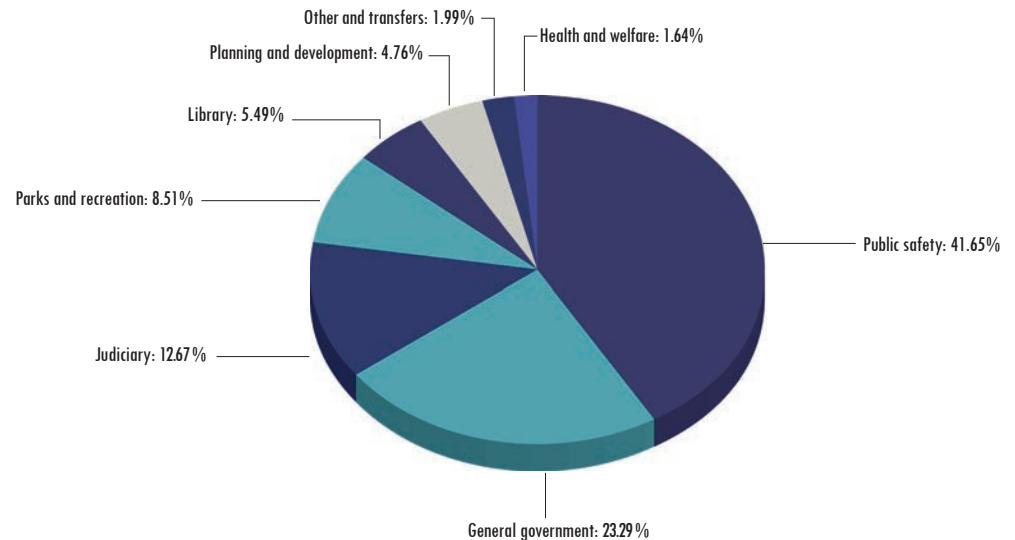
County Expenditures

In 2014, the adopted General Fund expenditure budget totaled \$96 million. General Fund expenditures in 2014 came in under budget, at approximately \$88.6 million.

Public safety (the sheriff, coroner and ambulance services) utilizes the largest portion of the General Fund, representing 41.65% of total expenditures in 2014. 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 56.36% of General Fund expenditures in 2014. The remaining expenditures are for the transfer of General Fund resources to other funds.

FY 2014 General Fund Expenditures

Unaudited Data



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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. In the first 18 months of collections, through December 2014, approximately \$49.1 million was received.

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



County's Bond Rating Upgraded

In 2014, Standard & Poor's upgraded Forsyth County's bond rating to the highest rating possible. Standard & Poor's rating increased from AA+ to AAA with a stable outlook. A number of factors were cited as contributing to the upgrade of the rating, including the county's very strong economy; strong financial profile; management; and good financial practices.

The county's rating from Moody's Investors Service remains Aaa with a stable outlook, the highest rating available from Moody's. Forsyth is one of only three counties in Georgia with the Aaa rating from Moody's.

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 20 grants in 2014, totaling more than \$4 million. The county received grants from federal, state and private foundations for a variety of uses including law enforcement personnel; road improvements; environmental education; environmental restoration; emergency preparedness; operations of Juvenile Court, Felony Drug Court and DUI Court; senior services; public transportation; criminal alien assistance; and crime victim assistance. Grant funding was secured in 2014 to provide increased funding of more than \$500,000 to the accountability drug courts and for the enhancement of features at Forsyth County's Charleston Park.

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AT A GLANCE

886

new
business licenses issued

9,767

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

687

traffic signs installed



1,917

new water and sewer customers added
in 2014, bringing the total number of
customers at the end of 2014 to

52,309



430

average daily visits
to the county's three
recreation centers, a
70% increase from
2013

115

Adopt-A-Road
cleanups removed
569 bags of litter
from roadways



127,251

calls for service handled by
the Sheriff's Office

16,728

trips provided by the
Dial-A-Ride program



37,557

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



12,799

alarms answered by
the Fire Department

6,355

building permits
issued by Forsyth
County

590

Child safety seat
inspections conducted by
trained Fire Department
technicians to ensure
proper installation



4,350

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



5,610

people - ranging from babies through adults - participated in
the Summer Reading Fun program at the Forsyth County Public
Library, a 22% increase from 2013

203,513

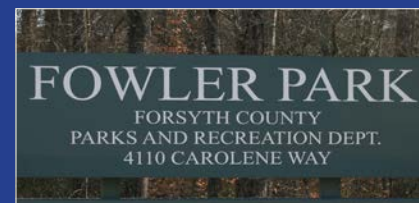
calls handled
by the 911 Center

159

county roads
covering **50.17**
miles resurfaced

168

teams from **28**
states participated
in the Triple Crown's
National Fast Pitch
Softball Tournament
held at Fowler Park



3,824,000

pounds of materials recycled
through the county's three
recycling convenience centers
and various recycling programs



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2014

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FORSYTHCOUNTY

Board of Commissioners

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