

# Forsyth County

Annual Report **2016**



# 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.

## Date of Incorporation

December 3, 1832



## Form of Government

Commission-County Manager



## Total Area in Square Miles

247



## 2016 Population Estimate

221,009



## County Government Employees as of December 31, 2016

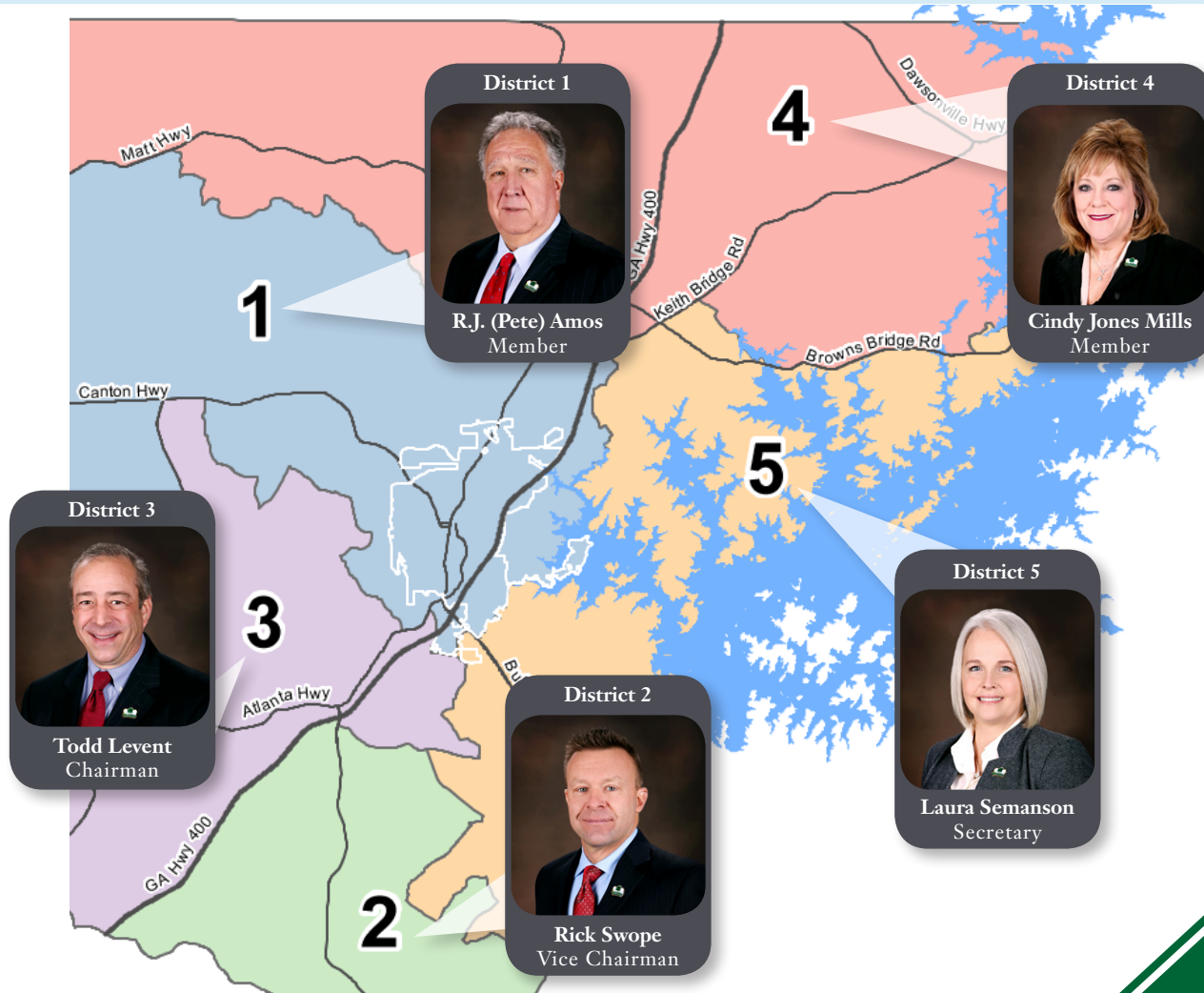
1,310 Full-time

406 Part-time/Seasonal



\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## 2017 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



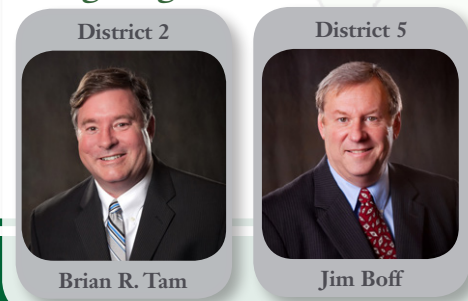
**The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners** is made up of five members, each living in a specific district and elected by their district to serve four-year terms. Each January, the five members elect officers for the coming year.

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.

### Outgoing Commissioners



Forsyth County would like to thank outgoing District 2 Commissioner Brian R. Tam and outgoing District 5 Commissioner Jim Boff for their service to the citizens of Forsyth County. Tam and Boff left office at the end of 2016.

## Administration





# Message from the Chairman



**Here in Forsyth County,** progress can be seen every day, everywhere you turn. Whether it be the preservation of parks and green space – which has grown to more than 2,700 acres, the opening of a new fire station or improvements to a roadway, there is no shortage of great things taking place in our community.

In this annual report, you'll have the opportunity to learn about some of the many highlights from 2016. I hope this not only gives you an overview of recent accomplishments but also shows the positive direction in which our county continues to move.

Among the projects you will read about in this publication is the opening of the first portion of the State Route 400 widening. This project – which, when completed, will add an additional northbound lane and southbound lane on SR 400 from McFarland Parkway to SR 369 – will vastly improve mobility in our county. We have the citizens of Forsyth County, who approved the 2014 Transportation Bond, and the Georgia Department of Transportation, with whom the county is partnering, to thank for making this widening project possible. There are many more projects both underway and in the planning stages that are designed to relieve congestion and enhance the safety of our roadways.

These projects are not just investments in infrastructure – they are investments in our citizens' quality of life. People choose to live and invest in Forsyth County because of all that it has to offer, and we look forward to maintaining the outstanding quality of life for which our community is known. Thank you for the privilege of serving you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd Levent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Todd Levent

2017 Chairman and District 3 Commissioner





## Message from the County Manager

**Thank you for taking the time** to read the 2016 Forsyth County Annual Report. This publication serves as a brief summation of the many programs, services and amenities provided to the citizenry by Forsyth County government. The county staff is proud of the work we do and honored to have the opportunity to serve you.

Among the many accomplishments you will read about in this year's report include the accreditation of the county's 911 center, the naming of Forsyth County as the healthiest in Georgia for the fourth consecutive year and the District Agency of the Year Award garnered by Forsyth County Parks & Recreation. These are accomplishments about which we can all be proud – and they were all undertaken and achieved with you, the citizen, in mind. Everything we do as a county government is focused on the service we provide to the community and striving each and every day to continually improve that service.

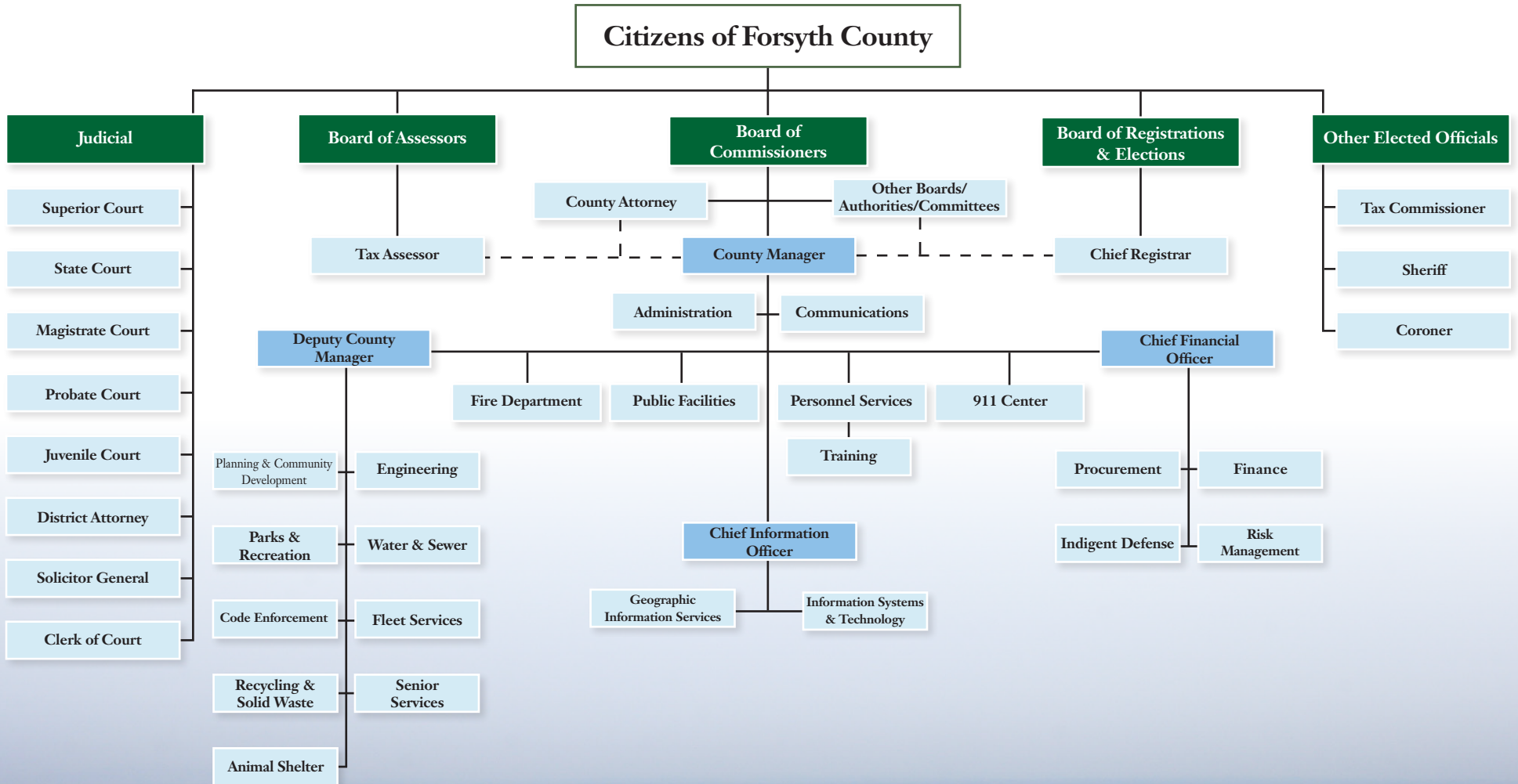
Following nine years with Forsyth County government and a total of 40 years of public service, I will retire in spring 2017. Serving with the Board of Commissioners, county staff and this community has been extremely rewarding and has resulted in many successes. Leaving behind the dedicated, talented and well-trained staff with whom I have had the privilege to work will be difficult, but I know that they will continue to serve you well in the years ahead. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to be a part of this amazing county.

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

# FORSYTH COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





# 2016 in Review



## Phase III of Sawnee Mountain Preserve Opens

The newest phase of Forsyth County's Sawnee Mountain Preserve, located north of downtown Cumming at 2505 Bettis Tribble Gap Road, opened January 29. Funded by the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond approved by voters in 2008 and by the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VI program, the new phase features more than six miles of hiking trails, two picnic pavilions, a playground with a rubberized surface, restrooms and additional parking. Sawnee Mountain Preserve encompasses 963 acres, 11 miles of trails, picnic areas and an interactive visitor center.

## Accountability Courts Continue to Serve the Community

Forsyth County Accountability Courts had a successful year of graduations with 17 participants graduating from Drug Court, 21 graduating from DUI Court and seven graduating from the first Mental Health Court C.A.R.E Program, and celebrated a milestone 10-year anniversary for DUI Court. The Accountability Courts are focused on linking participants to the proper treatment, resources and supervision, and empowering participants to make positive changes in their lives.



Station #6



Station #8

## Ground Broken for New Fire Stations 6 and 8

In February, Forsyth County broke ground on two new fire stations – Station 6 and Station 8. Construction of both stations was funded by the voter-approved SPLOST VI program and by Impact Fees. New Fire Station 6, located in the southern portion of Forsyth County just off of Peachtree Parkway on Caney Road, is expected to improve service and reduce response times in a densely populated area of the county. New Fire Station 8, on Keith Bridge Road in the northeast portion of the county, will replace the original Station 8, which was built by volunteers in 1984 and had far exceeded its life expectancy. The new Fire Station 8 is designed for 24-hour occupancy, which the previous station was not. Both are four-stall stations, designed to accommodate the personnel and equipment that will operate out of the facility and to allow for future growth. Both stations opened in spring 2017.



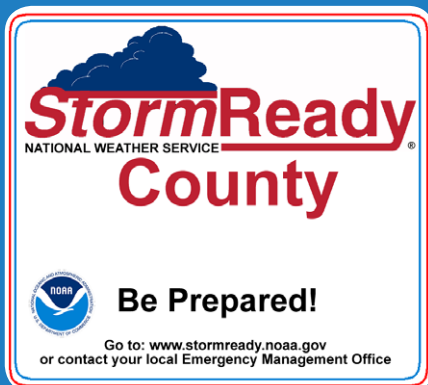
## Ground Broken for Lanierland Park in Northeast Forsyth County

Ground was broken on March 18 for Lanierland Park, a 109-acre park in northeast Forsyth County off of Jot-Em-Down Road. Its construction was funded by the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond and by Impact Fees. The county purchased the land for Lanierland Park in 2009 with funds from the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond. The new park features four rectangular synthetic-turf fields, two picnic pavilions, a playground, restroom and concession facility, and parking. Lanierland Park opened in spring 2017.



## County Undertakes Comprehensive Plan Update Process

Beginning in March, the Forsyth County Department of Planning & Community Development began the course of updating the county's Comprehensive Plan through a process named *Foster Forsyth*. The plan is a guide, which focuses on community elements such as housing, transportation, zoning and other land-use matters as well as economic development over the next 20 years. It seeks to identify strategies to address community character and quality of life through policy recommendations and implementation measures in order to achieve the community's future vision. Public outreach included 14 community workshops, an online survey, community event kiosks, stakeholder interviews and other engagement opportunities that occurred during the spring and summer. In addition, two committees were formed to assist in the formulation of a community vision and strategies to address future land use. In the fall, public hearings were held, and the Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners made recommendations to the plan. The Board of Commissioners will consider transmittal of the plan for state and regional review with subsequent adoption in 2017. Outside consulting group Jacobs in collaboration with Kimley-Horn has led this effort alongside county staff.



## Forsyth County Re-Recognized as StormReady

In June, the National Weather Service re-recognized Forsyth County as a StormReady® Community, a designation reflecting the county's high level of severe weather preparedness. Forsyth County was first recognized as a StormReady® Community in 2007 and is currently one of 94 counties in Georgia to have earned this recognition. To be deemed StormReady®, a community must have a local 24-hour Emergency Operations Center, provide the public with more than one way to receive severe weather warnings, be able to monitor weather conditions locally, promote public readiness through community seminars and have a formal hazardous weather plan in place.

# Honorary Road Renamings Honor Fallen Public Safety Personnel

As a way to honor four Forsyth County public safety personnel who fell in the line of duty, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners approved the renaming of four county roads.

Deputy Bill Cantrell and Reserve Deputy Larry Mulkey were shot and killed in 1972, after being abducted during a traffic stop.



- The segment of North Old Atlanta Road from Georgia State Route 9/Atlanta Highway to Ronald Reagan Boulevard was designated as “Deputy Bill Cantrell Memorial Road.”

- The segment of North Old Atlanta Road from Hutchinson Road to Georgia State Route 9/Atlanta Highway was designated as “Larry Mulkey Memorial Road.”



Allyn Lane and Dennis C. Martin were both volunteer firefighters for Forsyth County who died in automobile accidents en route to their respective fire stations to respond to calls. Lane passed away in 1975 and Martin in 1984. Brant Chesney was a full-time firefighter with Gwinnett County and a volunteer firefighter for Forsyth County who died in the line of duty in 1996 while battling a structure fire in Forsyth County.

- The roadway leading into Shady Grove Campground was designated as “Allyn Lane Memorial Way.”
- The roadway leading into Coal Mountain Park was designated as “Dennis C. Martin Memorial Way.”
- Several years ago, the roadway along Forsyth County Fire Station 10 on Old Atlanta Road was designated as “Brant Chesney Way.”



## Honorary Names Given to Two Intersections

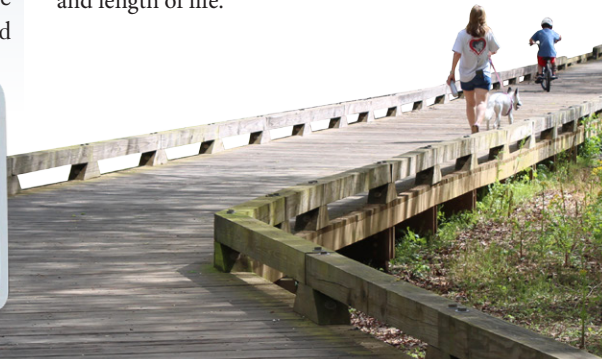
In May, through the collaborative efforts of the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, Georgia General Assembly and Georgia Department of Transportation, two intersections – located in areas rich in Forsyth County history – were given honorary names. The intersection of Highways 306 and 369 was named Hammond’s Crossing, and the intersection of Highways 9 and 369 was named Coal Mountain.

## Forsyth Named Healthiest County in Georgia for the Fourth Consecutive Year

In 2016, Forsyth County was again named the healthiest county in the state – No. 1 among Georgia’s 159 counties. The distinction came as part of the annual County Health Rankings & Roadmaps study initiated by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The rankings are based on county residents’ quality of life and length of life.

## New Shakerag Water Reclamation Facility Opens

Forsyth County’s new state-of-the-art Shakerag Water Reclamation Facility officially opened July 29. Located off Kemp Road in south Forsyth County, the new plant is the first of the county’s seven water reclamation facilities to return water to the Chattahoochee River. The property on which the facility is located was identified as the best location in the county for a water reclamation facility in the 1993 Forsyth County Sewerage System Master Plan. The property was acquired in 1996 and, over the course of the next 20 years, the county obtained a number of necessary permits with many opportunities for public comments and input. The plant occupies approximately 12 of the property’s total 287 acres, leaving most of the property in a natural condition. Since 2004, more than 180 of those acres have been utilized as a land application system for treated wastewater from the Fowler and James Creek water reclamation facilities. The property is also the site of the South Forsyth Soccer Complex, which opened in 2003.





## Phase 4 of Big Creek Greenway Opens

The newest phase of Forsyth County's Big Creek Greenway opened for use in August. The new stretch of the popular multi-use trail extends the Greenway by approximately 2.8 miles, resulting in a total trail length of approximately 9.6 miles. Phase 4 begins at the Bethelview Road Trailhead and generally runs northward along Big Creek, then runs parallel to Kelly Mill Road and ends at Johnson Road. The project was funded by the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond.



### Meincke Sworn In as Forsyth County Associate Juvenile Court Judge

Randall A. Meincke was sworn into office August 5, as the first full-time associate Juvenile Court judge for Forsyth County. Judge Meincke became the county's 10th full-time member of the judiciary, joining Judge J. Russell Jackson as the second full-time judge in

the Juvenile Court of Forsyth County. Judge Meincke had served for the past two years as a part-time associate judge to the Juvenile Court.

### Matt Community Park at Settingdown Creek Opens in Northwest Forsyth County

The approximately 180-acre Matt Community Park at Settingdown Creek, located at 6555 Wallace Tatum Road in the northwest portion of the county, opened August 12. Phase I of the park includes four synthetic-turf rectangular fields, a playground, concession and restroom buildings, two pavilions and maintenance facility. The property for the new park was acquired with funding from the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond. Construction of Phase I of the park was funded by both the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond and by Impact Fees.



### Library System Marks 20th Anniversary

On August 25, the Forsyth County Public Library (FCPL) celebrated its 20th anniversary with an event held at the Cumming Library. Founded in 1996, FCPL has expanded from a single library to four branches and an administrative headquarters with the highest circulation per capita of all the library systems in Georgia.





Procurement Department Launches

## Vendor Self Service Portal



In September, the county's Procurement Department took another step in making it easier to do business with the county government by launching the online Vendor Self Service Portal – accessible from the Procurement Department page at [forsythco.com](http://forsythco.com). The new portal allows vendors to do many things online that previously had to be submitted in hardcopy form.

## First Portion of Widened State Route 400 North Opens



### Parks & Recreation Receives District Agency of the Year Award

Less than one year after the groundbreaking for the project to widen State Route 400 in Forsyth County, officials gathered on October 5 to ceremoniously cut the ribbon on the first portion of widened roadway, an 8-mile northbound stretch from McFarland Parkway to just north of Highway 20. The project was a partnership between Forsyth County and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), with GDOT contributing \$13 million and 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. The entire widening project is expected to be completed in 2018.

Forsyth County Parks & Recreation received the Georgia Recreation and Park Association District 7 Agency of the Year Award during the District 7 banquet held October 26. The award was presented to three population groups within the district, with Forsyth County falling into the largest population category – 50,001 and over. The agency of the year award identifies the outstanding efforts of recreation and park agencies across the seventh district.





## Ground Broken for Sharon Forks Library Expansion

On November 14, ground was broken for the expansion of the Sharon Forks Library located in southeast Forsyth County. The Sharon Forks branch lends out more materials than any other library in the state – checking out more than 1 million items in 2016. The expansion will add about 18,000 square feet to the library's existing 20,000

square feet, almost doubling the building's size. Local SPLOST funds, county Impact Fees and \$2 million from the state budget funded the project, which is expected to be completed in 2018.

## Parks & Recreation Complete Comprehensive Master Plan Update

Forsyth County Parks & Recreation's Comprehensive Master Plan Update was formally adopted by the Board of Commissioners in November. In addition to results of a community survey, the plan contains an overview of current amenities, public involvement (including feedback from stakeholders, focus groups and public meetings) and recommendations for improvement and expansion. The Comprehensive Master Plan Update will guide the county's Parks & Recreation Department through future budget decisions and park system projects until 2026.

### Work Begins on Eagle's Beak Park in Northwest Forsyth County



Ground was broken November 15 for Eagle's Beak Park, which will be located off of Old Federal Road in Ball Ground. Phase I of the new park will feature a canoe and kayak launch on the Etowah River, nature trails, restroom facility and parking. Its construction is being funded by the Parks, Recreation and Green Space Bond and the SPLOST VI program, and is slated for completion in 2017.





## Sheriff's Office Awarded State Accreditation

The Forsyth County Sheriff's Office received certification from the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Certification Program in 2016, marking the fourth time the agency has earned the three-year certification. Certification status represents a significant professional achievement and recognizes the execution of policies and procedures that are conceptually sound and operationally effective.

## National Awards Received for County Communications Efforts



The National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO) recognized the county's communications efforts through the 2016 NACIO Awards of Excellence. The Forsyth County Fire Department 2014 Annual Report received the award of Meritorious in the competition's annual reports category. The county's website – [forsthythco.com](http://forsthythco.com) – which was redesigned in 2015, received the award of Meritorious in the competition's electronic communications/website category. The new Forsyth County logo and branding, adopted in 2015 and highlighting the county's outstanding natural resources and quality of life, received the award of Excellence in the graphic design category.

## New Software Implemented for Public Safety Efficiency



Forsyth County's public safety agencies worked together to implement SunGard ONESolution public safety software. The software is designed to enhance the efficiency of the agencies and streamline processes with the ultimate goal of decreasing emergency response times of first responders.

## Forsyth County 911 Center Awarded CALEA Certification

In November, the Forsyth County 911 Center was awarded the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) Public Safety Communications Accreditation. CALEA accreditation is awarded through a process of systematic review and assessment of a communications center's operations and procedures and is regarded as the primary method a center can demonstrate its commitment to excellence. Of the approximately 160 Public Safety Answering Points in Georgia, only eight agencies are CALEA accredited – Forsyth County is now one of those eight.





# Financial Outlook

## How is the County Government Funded?

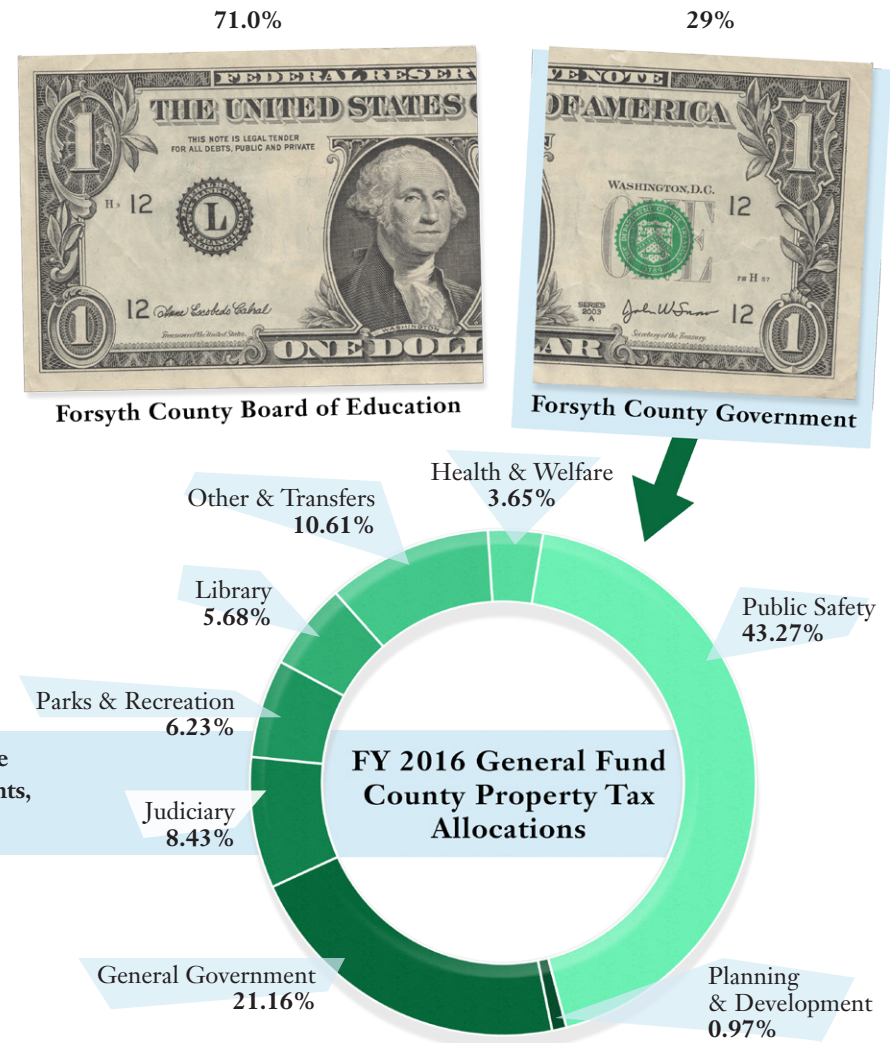
The four sources comprising the majority of the General Fund revenues are taxes, charges for services, fines and forfeitures, and licenses and permits. Revenue from **taxes** accounts for approximately 78.3% of the total revenue for the county's General Fund. This includes taxes from property, motor 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 11.2% 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 2.1% 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 5.8% 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 & Sewer Department and the Recycling & 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.

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

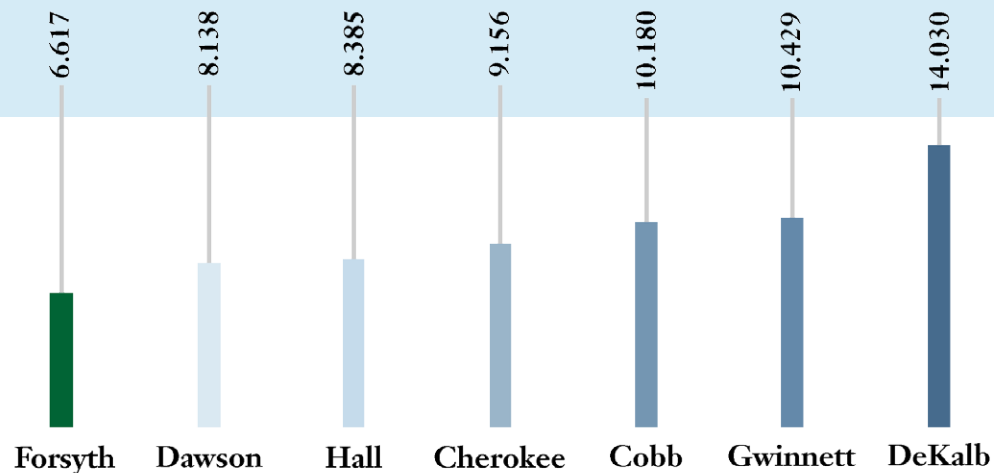
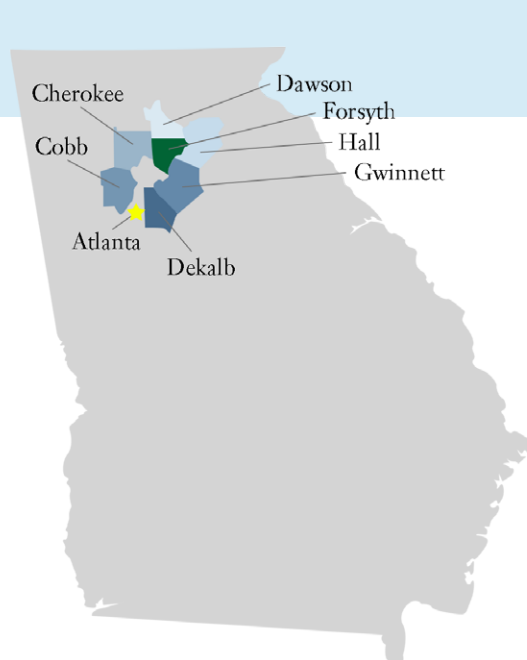
## Where do your property taxes go?

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

In 2016, the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners maintained the Maintenance and Operations millage rate of 4.642 as well as maintained the Fire millage rate of 1.975. This resulted in no change in the combined rate of 6.617.



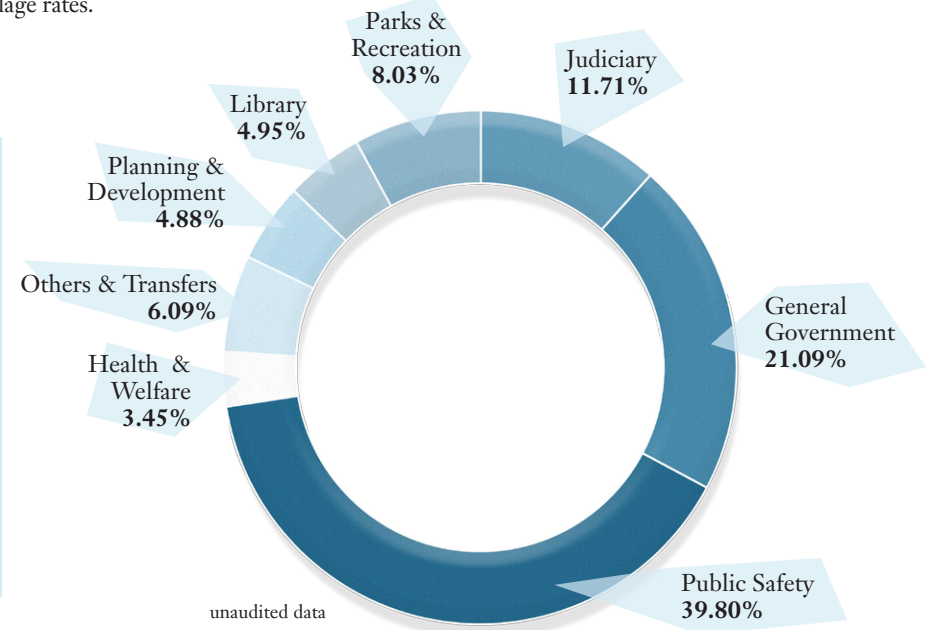
Compared to neighboring counties, Forsyth County continues to have one of the lowest millage rates.

Source: Georgia Department of Revenue

## County Expenditures

In 2016, the adopted General Fund expenditure budget totaled \$108.9 million. General Fund expenditures in 2016 came in under budget, at approximately \$107.1 million.

Public safety (the sheriff, coroner and ambulance services) utilizes the largest portion of the General Fund, representing 39.8% of total expenditures in 2016. 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 54.1% of General Fund expenditures in 2016. The remaining expenditures are for the transfer of General Fund resources to other funds.





# Penny Sales Tax

## Funds Capital Improvement

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. 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.



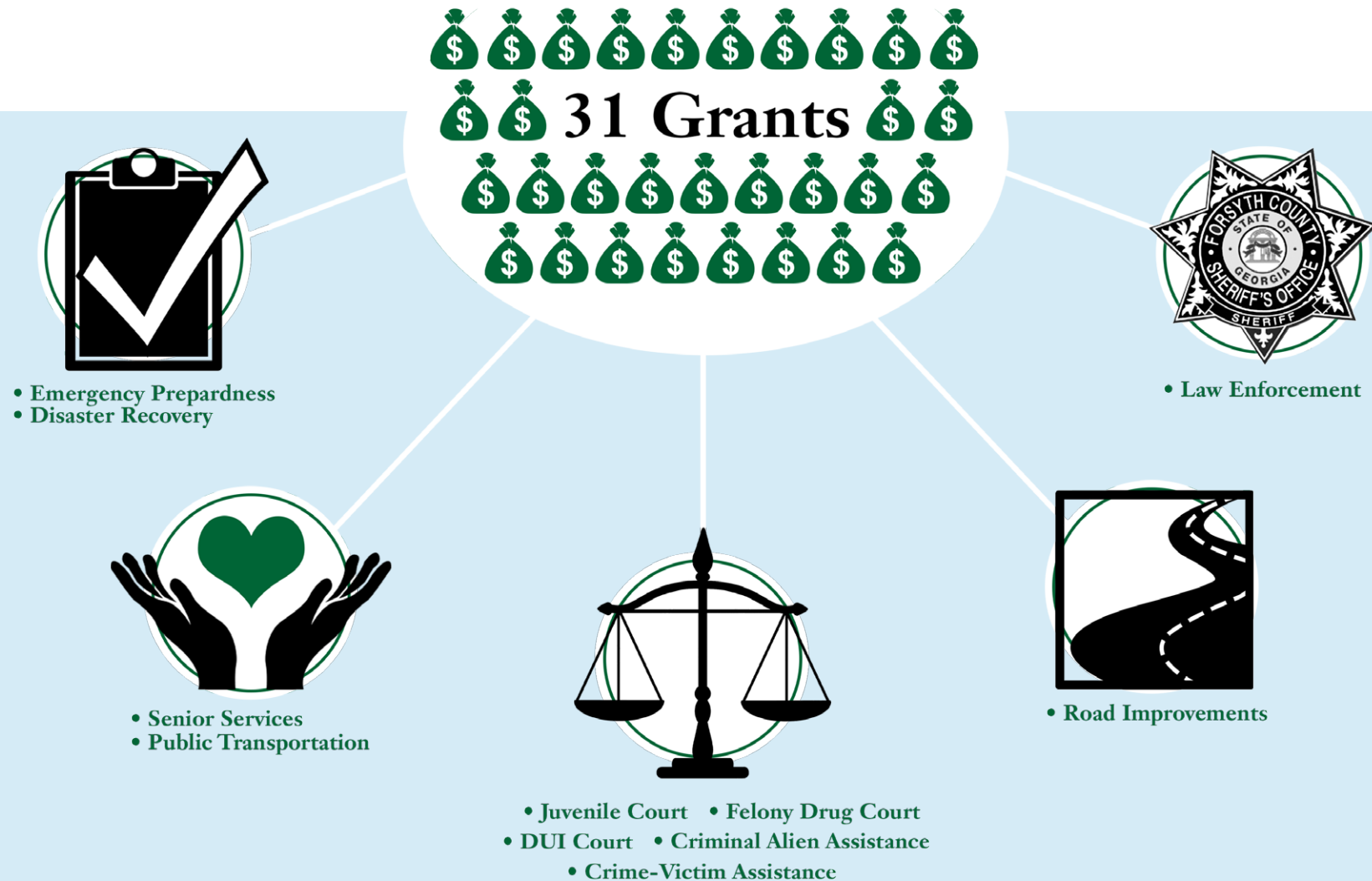
The current SPLOST program, SPLOST VII, was approved by voters November 8, 2011. It went into effect July 1, 2013, and will expire June 30, 2019. Projections for the six-year program anticipate total collections of approximately \$200 million. Collections through December 31, 2016, totaled \$119.3 million.

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, and an emergency raw-water generator completed in 2016. Other projects slated to be completed with SPLOST VII funding include transportation projects, scheduled replacement of fire apparatus, and expansion and repurposing of the Sharon Forks Library.



# Grants Fund County Programs and Services

Forsyth County was awarded 31 grants in 2016, totaling more than \$3.5 million. The county received grants from federal, state and private foundations for a variety of uses including law enforcement personnel, road improvements, emergency preparedness and disaster recovery. Other programs include operations of Juvenile Court, Felony Drug Court, DUI Court, Senior Services, public transportation, criminal alien assistance and crime-victim assistance. Grant funding of \$1.2 million was secured from the Georgia Department of Transportation in 2016 for the widening of Union Hill Road.



# 2016 By the Numbers



**4,066**  
hours

of Alzheimer's Respite Care  
provided through Senior Services



**1,035**  
new business  
licenses  
issued

**171,865**



calls dispatched to the Sheriff's Office

**668,000**

library visitors checked out



**139,679**



83% of whom  
cast a ballot in the  
**GENERAL  
ELECTION**

**334**

child safety  
seats installed  
by the  
Fire Department's  
trained technicians



**2,479,572** print and digital  
eLibrary items

**3,829**

reservations made at

**SHADY GROVE**

CAMPGROUND



**188,367**

pounds of electronics  
recycled



**182,007**

recreation center pass visits



**403**

participants  
in Senior Services'  
continuing education classes

**14,966**

gallons of



recycled





The average number of calls  
**644**

handled per day by the 911 Center

**192** county roads resurfaced  
totaling **65.1** miles

**1,874**  
new water customers added,  
bringing the total number of  
water customers to **57,419**

**18**  
new firefighters  
joined the ranks

of the Fire Department after completion of a

**32** week  
firefighter/EMT  
recruit training school

**13,873**  
calls  
handled  
by the  
**Fire Department**

**1,590**  
new sewer customers added,  
bringing the total number of  
sewer customers to **29,460**

**201** cats  
adopted from the  
Forsyth County Animal Shelter

**269** dogs

**38,631**  
meals  
delivered  
to homebound  
seniors  
through the Meals on  
Wheels program

**19,166**  
rides provided by  
**DIAL-A-RIDE**  
covering **227,876** miles driven



# Forsyth County

## Annual Report **2016**

Board of Commissioners • 110 E. Main Street, Suite 210  
Cumming, Georgia 30040 • (770) 781-2101 • [forsythco.com](http://forsythco.com)  
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