

gwinnettcounty **state of the county**

january 2009

Local Economy and County Finances

The year 2008 presented numerous challenges for local, state, and national economies. It was a difficult year; yet Gwinnett is a prosperous and dynamic county that continues to attract thousands of new residents each year, drawn by excellent employment and education opportunities, a wide range of housing options, and a celebrated quality of life.

- Our population now stands at an estimated 797,422 residents, up 200,000 since the 2000 Census (*US Bureau of the Census and Gwinnett's Economic Analysis Division*)
- Gwinnett gained more than 470 jobs, a growth of 0.1 percent between 2006 and 2007, contrasted with 1.3 percent statewide (*Georgia Department of Labor*). Gwinnett had 318,686 jobs in the second quarter of 2008 (*latest figure available*), down 2.4 percent from the same quarter in the previous year
- Unemployment is 6.4 percent compared to 7.2 percent statewide (*Georgia Department of Labor, November 2008*)
- Gwinnett County has rolled back the millage rate with the passage of the 1997 and 2001 SPLOST a total 2.0 mills; combined with rollbacks to offset property value updates, the County has reduced the millage rate a total 2.48 mills since 1997—an 18.5 percent reduction to the total county millage (this includes a .25 mill addition in 2003 for the voter-approved jail expansion)
- Gwinnett's Tax Assessor assessed 12,000 new lots and houses/buildings totaling more than \$900 million and updated assessments on 40,000 properties during 2008

Excellent Credit History

Gwinnett has maintained AAA credit ratings from the three major credit rating agencies for the past 11 years. Only 22 counties across the nation can boast triple-AAA ratings. We issued \$237.5 million of revenue bonds in 2008 through the water and sewer and development authorities. Our excellent credit results in significant interest savings for Gwinnett residents.

Service-Value-Responsibility Cost-Management Initiative

Gwinnett County has held the line or reduced its county tax rate every year since 1991 and holds the highest possible credit ratings. Since 2000, however, forecasts have projected slower revenue growth and increasing costs. Last year's budgeted use of reserves was \$56 million to help cover operating costs.

In recent years, Gwinnett has stepped up economic development efforts, launched a series of efficiency studies, and kept tight control of budget growth. In 2008, the County undertook a comprehensive services review and cost management study. The goal of the **Service-Value-Responsibility** project was to find \$35 million in ongoing savings. More than 80 employees served on 10 evaluation teams led by senior management and facilitated by a consultant.



Club Drive Park

The teams reviewed departmental budgets and operations and created a list of ways to cut costs and improve efficiency. Among the areas under examination were non-core services, administrative functions, rates and fees, productivity, facility operations and maintenance, equipment, inventories, supplies, and personnel costs including overtime and benefits. About 150 cost-saving options were identified, and many of those have been implemented in the 2009 interim budget. Other options could take effect in subsequent years, all in an effort to improve the County's financial security and focus on its core responsibilities.

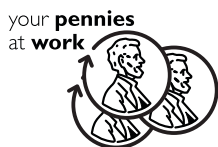
2009 Interim Budget

Gwinnett commissioners adopted a \$1.38 billion interim budget for 2009 at their first meeting in January as required by County code. This budget cuts \$26.2 million in expenditures and delays decisions on another \$10.5 million in program modifications. These cuts, identified by the *Service-Value-Responsibility* initiative, will greatly reduce the County's use of reserve funds to balance the budget.

The interim budget eliminates more than 100 full-time positions, postpones adding 88 new courts and public safety positions, and continues the County's hiring freeze. Expansion and renovation plans for Juvenile Court and the One Justice Square building are also delayed, while staff compensation adjustments will help reduce costs by approximately \$1.6 million. The County will seek more annual revenue mostly by raising ambulance fees and slightly increasing convenience fees for credit card transactions for a total of about \$1.2 million.

County officials are studying the potential impact of more reductions in staff and service levels and are waiting to see how state budget cutbacks will affect local governments before the Board adopts a final budget in March.

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)



2005 SPLOST

- Began April 1, 2005, and ends on March 31, 2009
- Will have raised about \$585 million over four years
- Transportation, public safety, park, and library projects
- Gwinnett's 15 cities will share about \$94 million

2009 SPLOST

- Approved by voters on November 4, 2008, and starts on April 1, 2009
- Expected to raise about \$785 million over five years
- Transportation, public safety, park, library, and courthouse expansion projects
- County portion budgeted conservatively at \$596 million
- Cities will share about \$122 million

Capital Budget

Examples of projects designated in the 2009 Capital Budget include:

- Expand Rabbit Hill and Rhodes Jordan Parks' facilities
- Continue Hamilton Mill Library construction
- Continue fire station relocations and additions
- Continue Sugarloaf Parkway and McGinnis Ferry Road extensions
- Continue road program including rehabilitation and resurfacing

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Accomplishments

Economic Development and Revitalization

- Economic development has been a priority since 2006 when the Board of Commissioners adopted an Economic Development Ordinance and created an Economic Analysis Division; efforts have continued through support of Partnership Gwinnett, a Chamber-led community and economic development initiative
- Partnership Gwinnett's efforts have resulted in 40 companies relocating or expanding major new facilities, accounting for almost 3,000 new jobs
- Major corporate expansions include Cisco and Xicom Wireless
- Thanks to the County's incentive package, two companies relocated to Gwinnett in 2008: Suniva, Inc. (\$75 million relocation, 100 new jobs) and NCR (300 new jobs)
- An updated—and more flexible—economic development ordinance and voter approval of Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) in unincorporated Gwinnett will help redevelopment efforts
- Voter approval of a redevelopment powers referendum allowed Gwinnett County to establish the Gwinnett County Redevelopment Agency
- Quality of Life Unit issued 10,999 violation notices and 6,409 citations, made 158 arrests, removed 13,778 unpermitted signs, and towed 1,480 vehicles
- Inmates and community service laborers removed litter from 5,000 miles of roads, cleaned/landscaped all 39 parks, processed 25 million pounds of recyclable materials, and eradicated 94,000 square feet of graffiti at 368 sites

Planning and Development

- Finalized the 2030 Unified Plan for land use, housing, and transportation organized around five themes
- Continued work to automate plan review process by upgrading software for electronic submittal
- Adopted new zoning amendments for mixed-use overlay (MUO) developments, cemeteries, and standalone ice-vending machines
- Served 43,508 customers
- Issued 7,789 building permits, including 1,054 new single-family, 142 new development, and 1,144 commercial

Community Services

- **Parks and Recreation**
 - Won *National Gold Medal Award* for best parks program in the United States
 - New parks and amenities opened: West Gwinnett Park and Aquatic Center, Duncan Creek Park, Peachtree Ridge Park, Ivy Creek Greenway, Lucky Shoals Park Community Center, and Club Drive Park
- **Health and Human Services**
 - 95,497 Meals on Wheels delivered
 - 38,328 meals served in the Lawrenceville Senior Center
 - Emergency assistance and home repair grant funds for seniors
 - 4,644 case management and 5,497 in-home respite care hours
 - Volunteers contributed more than 45,000 service hours, including 1,100 hours by Mill Creek High School students
- **Elections and Voter Registration**
 - 123,000 people voted in advance at five locations
 - Implemented online training for poll workers
- **Library**
 - 7.1 million items checked out
 - Construction began on Hamilton Mill Branch Library, the County's third green building and 15th branch library



Hamilton Mill Branch Library



Public Safety

- Police reported a decrease in homicides (19 percent), robberies (three percent), aggravated assault (nine percent), automobile thefts (19 percent), and commercial burglaries (12 percent), and an increase in DUI arrests (20 percent); enforcement plans to address increased residential burglaries (nine percent) have already been implemented
- Fire and Emergency Services responded to 65,000 calls, hired 85 firefighters, trained 30 firefighters as paramedics, and certified 5,844 citizens in CPR and 7,885 in first-aid
- Corrections offset 52 percent of its budget through inmate fees and labor
- Opened new Fire Station 28 near Loganville ahead of schedule and under budget
- Began construction of new Fire Station 29 near Braselton and relocations for Fire Station 7 in Duluth and Fire Station 18 in Hamilton Mill
- Began construction of Police Annex/E-911 Center, which will open early 2010

General Government

- Developed succession plans for key management personnel and implemented Balanced Scorecard System to measure departmental performance
- Kept vacant positions below five percent and turnover rate below 10 percent
- Negotiated \$2.4 million in cost savings through various contracts with no reduction of scope
- Developed plan for long-term countywide energy and water conservation program
- Began multi-year project to replace HVAC system controls at Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center (GJAC)
- Maintained 95 percent fleet availability
- Relocated data center and deployed virtual data storage
- Provided free, wireless Internet access for jurors and GJAC visitors
- Upgraded computer systems and installed traffic-monitor video network

Transportation

- Expedited completion of 39 projects, totaling 144 in the last four years
- Completed 19 quick-fix, low-cost projects aimed at reducing congestion
- Spent \$120 million on SPLOST transportation improvements
- Opened a new state-of-the-art traffic control center that can monitor signal and intersection traffic to help improve flow and ease congestion
- Major county/state projects completed: I-85/316 Interchange; Pleasant Hill Road tunnel under Buford Highway

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and railroad tracks; State Route 20 through Grayson; State Route 120 between Lawrenceville and I-85; State Route 324 widening from State Route 20 to State Route 124

- Awarded contract for the Sugarloaf Parkway extension phase one, section two (New Hope Road to Martins Chapel Road)

*Sugarloaf
Parkway
Extension*



Commercial Reuse Customer

- Resurfaced 60 miles of roadway and maintained more than 2,750 miles of roads
- Maintained 643 traffic signals and installed 17; maintained 50 traffic cameras and 80 miles of fiber optic cables
- Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) installed on Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, US 29/Jimmy Carter Boulevard/Holcomb Bridge Road, State Route 20/Burford Drive, Lawrenceville-Suwanee Road, and State Route 124/Scenic Highway
- Gwinnett Transit had 1.95 million boardings through November 2008, up 7.1 percent
- Installed fence around Briscoe Field Airport where 433 aircraft are based and 76,000 takeoffs and landings occur annually

Water Resources

- *Save money, save time; pay your water bill online:* Implemented online bill view and bill pay countywide on January 1, 2009
- Continued water conservation efforts in fourth year of drought
- Started eight-mile, 72-inch pipeline to return up to 40 million gallons per day of highly-treated reclaimed water to Lake Lanier
- Placed in operation 45 miles of new water mains and 40 miles of sewer mains
- Upgraded three dams to comply with new safety regulations
- Installed 10,000 feet and lined 15,000 feet of stormwater pipe
- Rehabilitated 5,000 feet of streambeds

Award-Winning Government

- **2008 National Gold Medal Award** from National Recreation and Park Association
- National Association of Counties **2008 Achievement Awards** for selling surplus vehicles on eBay and for Fire and Emergency Services' special projects unit
- US EPA **2008 Plant of the Year Award** for Hill Water Resources Center and Georgia Association of Water Professionals **Gold and Platinum Awards**
- **Award for Excellence (Pension and Benefits), Distinguished Budget Presentation and Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting** from Government Finance Officers Association
- **Achievement of Excellence in Procurement** from National Purchasing Institute
- **Video, graphic design, writing, and photography awards** from National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors and National Association of County Information Officers
- American Society of Landscape Architects' state **2008 Merit Award** for Ivy Creek Greenway
- Georgia Chapter of the American Council of Engineering Companies **2008 Engineering Excellence Award** for the Gwinnett County Police Training Complex
- **Special Achievement in GIS Award** from Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.

