



SPOTLIGHT ON OCONEE

Oconee County is a vibrant and progressive place to be. In the following pages you, the taxpayer, will get a report on the status of projects that are underway and the accomplishments that have been achieved. If you desire additional details regarding any of these topics, please give me a call at 706-769-5120. Our intention is to keep you as informed as possible on our progress.

Thank you for visiting this site. Your comments will be appreciated.

Chairman Melvin Davis

Water Sources

Recently, the Board of Commissioners was faced with making a very difficult decision about water for Oconee's future. Essentially the decision boiled down to – do we make a decision now or do we wait, and if we make a decision now what avenue do we choose, Hard Labor Creek or Barnett Shoals or do we look at other alternatives? In a split vote, the Board chose Hard Labor Creek.

In choosing Hard Labor Creek there were two major reasons:

1. Financial -- It is a known fact that for every day construction is delayed, costs rise. An estimate of construction costs today is only an estimate. No one can predict what will happen down the road. Supply costs generally go up, construction costs rise, and real estate prices generally go up. Originally, a study indicated that Barnett Shoals was cheaper to build on our own rather than joining with Walton County in a joint venture on Hard Labor Creek. The idea of owning our own reservoir here in Oconee (Barnett Shoals) was very compelling. However, the land necessary for this project had not been acquired and the permitting process (always a very lengthy process) had not been started. Then, further study revealed the costs of Phase I for Barnett Shoals had been underestimated considerably. In contrast, Phase I of the project on Hard Labor Creek is well underway (having been started in 1997), permits from EPD are in hand, and land purchases are underway. Additionally the Walton County Board of Commissioners is now in charge of this project, instead of it being controlled by an Authority as it was when the project began. Further, the Oconee County Utility Department is well positioned to be able to afford the costs of our share of the Hard Labor Creek project, without impacting every taxpayer in the county.

2. Short-term need – Studies indicate that Oconee County will need an additional source of water by 2014, only seven years from now. The Hard Labor Creek project is the only practical way to produce enough water by that time.

All government indications show that Georgia will continue to be a destination point for much of the aging population (the boomer generation is a very large demographic block). A Census Bureau report of December 22, 2006 placed Georgia 4th in the fastest growing states in the country, surpassed only by Texas (1st), Florida (2nd), and California (3rd). Northeast Georgia is a very desirable place to live and Oconee is located in a very convenient spot in Northeast Georgia. Growth is inevitable. I submit to you that it is more responsible to be ahead of the curve than to be chasing its tail, trying to ameliorate what could have been avoided with well reasoned planning. It is our responsibility as elected officials to review the facts and to make hard decisions that we feel are in the best interest of those we represent. Some people say that population

projections used are too high. Time will tell if the population figures used are close to the mark. At any rate, water is a vital commodity and having more than enough is always more desirable than not having nearly enough. This topic does not end with this Board of Commissioners. Future boards will struggle with these same decisions on water for the future.

Parks and Recreation

Oconee Community Complex Progress



Economic Development

Russell “Rusty” Haygood has been hired as Oconee County’s Economic Development Director. He obtained a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Georgia in 2001 and was initially employed by the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center as a Government Services Specialist. For the last two years he has been working as the Director of Public Administration for the MGRDC in Macon.

Rusty will occupy the office near the BOC lobby on the second floor of the courthouse. He will join us in late May.

Board Action - April 2007

Deputy Clerk -- Jane Greathouse, my newly hired Executive Assistant, was appointed Deputy Clerk for the Board of Commissioners.

Elder Mill Park Grant -- The Board authorized the chairman to pursue a grant to protect some land around Elder Mill and Elder Mill Bridge so that development does not destroy the rusticity of the area.

Funding Assistance for new Elementary School -- Chairman Davis was authorized to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Town of North High Shoals for funding road improvements for the new elementary school to be built there. The projected cost will be approximately \$770,000.

Watkinsville Sewer Request -- Sewer capacity was approved for the Booth and Marable properties adjacent to the courthouse.

Budget

Work on the 2007-2008 budget began several weeks ago and the Board of Commissioners just completed public hearings with its department heads the week of April 9th. Now the serious business of balancing needs with the county's projected revenue begins. The new fiscal year starts July 1, 2007. Oconee is on sound financial footing and we intend to keep it that way.

Oconee County Millage History

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unincorporated Rate	8.48	8.48	8.48	8.48	8.23	8.23
School	16.4	16.3	16.3	17.1	16.9	17.7
State (mandated)	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
Millage Total for County (excludes municipalities)	25.13	25.03	25.03	25.83	25.38	26.18

Jail / E 911 / EOC

If you have traveled on SR 53 (Experiment Station Road) lately, you will have noticed that the old county jail has been demolished. Debris has been hauled away and a new parking area will soon take its place. The new jail and E 911 are now in operation. Sheriff Berry has indicated to the Board that area counties are interested in having Oconee County house some of their prisoners to lessen their overcrowding.

The Emergency Operations Center is still to be completed but should begin operations from its new site in the next few weeks.

