

Increasing Revenues and Growing Tax Digest Do Not Translate to Lower Taxes

By Wendell Dawson, Editor, AVOC, Inc • November 8, 2007

The Oconee County Tax Base and Sales Tax receipts have increased tremendously over the last 20 years. We are reaping the benefits of past planning and efforts of many who developed a basic infrastructure to allow it to happen.

Oconee has record receipts in Sales Taxes (LOST for County Operations; SPLOST for County Capital Projects; and ELOST for School Capital Projects). The County Tax Digest has grown dramatically. However, spending has used

all of that money and resulted in a historic record of indebtedness (\$ 10-12 Million for Park; \$ 10-12 Million for bigger jail; \$ 66 Million for Hard Labor Creek Water Project; Estimated \$ 20 Million Plus in Water-Sewer Debt; Millions for School buildings needed every other year etc).

Tax bills have also risen dramatically. The lack of tax relief shows the fallacy of the thinking that "Growth and Development" will diversify our Tax Base. The proliferation of sprawling subdivisions

and strip shopping centers has not brought taxes down for the homeowner.

In the 1980's, I remember John Brannen, Hubert Wells, Choyce Johnson, Carlton Farmer, Bob Marable, Bill Wagner and others working on sales tax and industrial development. Much effort was made to get voter support in 1986 for a new jail- the first SPLOST Capital Project. That "New Jail" was demolished by the current administration after only 20 years.

1986 Jail Demolished in 2007

A much bigger jail was built that costs much more to maintain and operate (including utilities and personnel). That keeps property taxes from going down.



New and Bigger Jail Opened in 2007

In my 30 year local government career, I saw volunteers and organizations raise funds to build Herman Michael Park and develop the Bogart Park and SPLOST funds were shepherded to acquire and start development of Heritage Park on U S 441 South. In early 2002, the Current Administration borrowed funds for a Mega-Park on GA 53 which is still under construction with numerous cost over-runs. That facility will also require additional personnel and maintenance and operations costs that will come from General Fund revenues.



Heritage Park still a work in progress

Schools are being built on a regular basis. Many of them are placed in rural areas on "Cheap Land" that ignites and spreads subdivision and commercial development. Our school system is a great one. However, it costs money and will cost more and more. The new schools also promote sprawl and increases traffic volume.

One wonders if a more moderate growth rate would let us more evenly absorb new students, improve our roads, increase our water and sewer capacity without a lot of debt and staggering operational costs.

This year's weather has shown us how deficient our water planning has been. Transportation is another infrastructure area that will be overwhelmed with growth. In time, traffic will overwhelm our rural, "farm to market" roads, many of which were built in the 1950's under a Rural Roads Authority of State Funding.

Water, roads, schools and such factors should be considered in rezones. Developers come and go. They make money and leave the county with the service and support burden. Some is good but excess and accelerated growth can kill "the Golden Goose" for all of us.

Water, roads and schools need a break. We need to pause and let them catch up with our growth. We need to use our increased revenues on needed infrastructure and on items that benefit the wider public. The Property Taxpayer needs **REAL RELIEF** and not just lip service.



Large "Community Park" on GA 53 under construction

Oconee Homes – 9 year tax bills and appraisals as of 11-5-07

(A) 13 year old house in subdivision near Butlers Crossing - 2,475 Heated Sq Feet

YEAR	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
APPR. VA LUE	209,825	213,578	217,462	228,546	234,376	236,299	240,864	244,864	287,692
TAX	1,847.31	1,680.76	1,669.65	1,730.04	1,787.23	1,862.91	1,875.47	1,974.45	2,262.05

(B) 35 Year old House near Watkinsville -2,202 Sq feet heated space

YEAR	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
APPR. VA LUE	159,195	163,121	168,546	173,169	179,641	185,045	194,723	208,479	226,681
TAX	1,536.55	1,501.79	1,506.20	1,501.98	1,565.26	1,669.58	1,737.02	1,933.41	1,984.85

Note: State Funding of increased homestead exemption started in 1999 at \$ 2000. It was capped at \$8000 since 2002. Subsequent millage rates "ate up" the exemption help. Without it, we would have \$200.00 more on our tax bill.

OCONEE TAX DIGEST AND 9 YEAR HISTORY OF LEVY

	1999	2003	2005	2007
Tot al County Value	649,330,466.00	939,089,716.00	1,151,267,267.00	1,546,947,899.00
Tot al County Taxes Levied	5,864,987.00	8,073,228.00	9,596,952.00	10,924,437.00

Oconee Sales Taxes FYs 1993-2007

Local Option Sales Tax Receipts – LOST - 1993-2007 FYs

Received	FY93	FY97	FY01	FY02	FY04	FY06	FY07
July	\$53,670.27	\$81,433.15	\$196,462.23	\$242,063.95	\$277,357.91	\$368,405.18	\$426,530.75
August	\$62,489.51	\$156,673.82	\$225,024.22	\$217,694.99	\$368,374.14	\$351,985.88	\$422,921.53
Sep tember	\$63,113.32	\$143,161.57	\$216,263.81	\$238,950.46	\$311,278.78	\$391,393.97	\$466,921.74
October	\$59,547.97	\$113,026.96	\$197,725.91	\$212,176.13	\$291,171.49	\$389,546.19	\$453,292.58
November	\$73,123.62	\$116,801.23	\$205,903.58	\$217,565.67	\$342,360.36	\$369,684.65	\$523,604.06
December	\$56,969.42	\$106,195.08	\$210,685.25	\$241,991.93	\$332,773.93	\$366,861.66	\$230,490.56
January	\$56,399.67	\$97,467.68	\$201,483.86	\$199,440.85	\$302,919.00	\$364,104.28	\$342,225.18
February	\$59,506.09	\$83,175.13	\$192,077.43	\$241,023.82	\$304,782.63	\$391,451.65	\$405,846.68
March	\$55,515.20	\$102,562.78	\$208,050.61	\$237,497.45	\$336,416.12	\$402,548.55	\$375,879.91
April	\$63,430.26	\$127,630.97	\$224,481.74	\$227,521.44	\$279,832.33	\$377,952.39	\$378,689.64
May	\$73,952.93	\$112,663.08	\$201,968.26	\$206,953.69	\$323,031.50	\$389,346.64	\$418,255.83
June	\$68,037.12	\$122,075.34	\$231,207.00	\$256,671.67	\$328,577.43	\$413,108.27	\$427,638.44
TOTALS	\$745,755.38	\$1,362,866.79	\$2,511,333.90	\$2,739,552.05	\$3,798,875.62	\$4,576,389.21	\$4,872,296.90

SPECIAL Local Option Sales Tax Receipts – SPLOST - 1993-2007 FYs

Received	FY93	FY97	FY01	FY02	FY04	FY06	FY07
July	\$67,703.34	\$98,107.17	\$228,633.28	\$281,396.67	\$302,076.36	\$410,745.92	\$483,903.26
August	\$69,442.24	\$173,712.80	\$262,560.50	\$253,078.55	\$414,061.80	\$397,299.12	\$477,048.60
Sep tember	\$78,992.47	\$166,798.24	\$252,377.41	\$275,032.44	\$349,630.86	\$437,783.94	\$528,311.41
October	\$71,298.70	\$132,477.76	\$229,913.89	\$244,802.20	\$326,685.40	\$440,102.29	\$511,534.64
November	\$85,977.49	\$108,924.23	\$238,589.73	\$253,875.37	\$377,819.43	\$429,343.40	\$582,405.21
December	\$68,500.32	\$97,717.92	\$245,514.38	\$270,328.33	\$375,031.76	\$414,208.46	\$259,740.93
January	\$68,164.34	\$93,891.85	\$233,783.64	\$225,835.65	\$341,464.80	\$414,709.67	\$386,207.58
February	\$71,460.16	\$171,306.67	\$224,009.42	\$270,961.09	\$342,081.04	\$440,796.29	\$458,480.53
March	\$63,701.11	\$121,309.25	\$240,723.08	\$267,304.11	\$377,403.72	\$454,117.70	\$423,196.47
April	\$75,346.47	\$141,448.44	\$261,806.44	\$255,250.37	\$313,938.11	\$406,028.92	\$427,212.12
May	\$86,527.57	\$133,687.61	\$233,517.13	\$231,253.75	\$382,310.51	\$440,469.97	\$471,356.40
June	\$79,418.48	\$143,527.15	\$262,932.81	\$289,025.44	\$368,953.06	\$467,241.79	\$482,396.85
TOTAL	\$886,532.69	\$1,582,909.09	\$2,914,361.71	\$3,118,143.97	\$4,271,456.85	\$5,152,847.47	\$5,491,794.00

2008 FY Receipts down for July & August

July SPLOST -1.86%

Aug SPLOST -9.53%

July LOST -1.28%

Aug LOST -9.63%

Could this be from housing slump?

WENDELL DAWSON'S BACKGROUND WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES

Oconee County Commission Chairman (1989 –2000)
 County Attorney for Oconee County, GA for 10 years- 70's-80's
 County Commissioner for 4 years-1973-77
 City Attorney for Watkinsville (1970 - 1988)
 City Attorney for North High Shoals (1970 - 1993)
 Oconee County School Board attorney (1970 - 1988)
 Charter Member, Oconee County Chamber of Commerce
 Chairman, 4th district, Association County Commissioners of GA(1993 - 1994)
 Chairman, Bd. of Directors North GA Regional Development Ctr. (1993 - 1994)

Director, Georgia Academy for Economic Development (1996 - 1997)
 Member, Georgia Water Campaign Advisory Board (1997 - 1999)
 Vice-Chair, Oconee County Development Authority (1996 - 2000)
 Chairman, Oconee County Board of Health (1993- 2000)
 Chairman, Trustees ACCG - IRMA Insurance Pool (1998 to 2000)
 Chairman, Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority (1994 - 2000)
 Member, Board of Managers, Assoc. County Commissioners of GA (1996–2000)
 Chairman, Region 5 Advisory Council Georgia DCA & DITT (1998-2000)
 For More Info, See <http://avoc.info/resume.php>

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P.O. Box 528 • Watkinsville, GA 30677

Wendell Dawson, Editor, AVOC, Inc.