



In Our 137th Year

Serving Oconee County

# The Oconee Enterprise

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THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER OF Helen Delong

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## City, business owner clash

Use of Elder property in dispute. Business, **B4**



## Man to skydive for nonprofit

Steve Nugent raises funds for ESP. Lifestyles, **A6**



## Miller reflects on year one

OCHS AD discusses first year at school. Sports, **B1**

## Coming next week

We'll report on an Oconee County murder trial.

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The Oconee County Library will relocate soon to Wire Park at 111 South Barnett Shoals Road. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

## Library will move to Wire Park in 2022

**BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA**

Both the city of Watkinsville and Board of Commissioners have recently signed a memorandum of understanding to move the Oconee County Library from Experiment Station Road to Wire Park off Barnett Shoals Road. The library is expected to open there in late 2022, or early 2023.

The MOU is with the Athens Regional Library System Board of Trustees and the Oconee County Library Board of Trustees.

"We are going to provide a beautiful and efficient building for the citizens of Oconee County," Athens Regional Library System Executive Director Valerie Bell said at a city council meeting.

Wire Park developer Duke Gibbs called the library the "civic anchor" of his development.

He said the commercial, office and restaurant tenants will complement the library because Wire Park will become a regional hub. He said the outdoor space and pavilion will also be used for library activities.

Wire Park used to house the former Southwire plant, which was originally built in the late 1950s as Anaconda Wire & Cable.

The current library measures 17,377 square feet. The new location provides for 25,000 square feet.

Gibbs has agreed to donate the property on which the library build-

ing will sit to the city of Watkinsville.

The library will assume day-to-day operational control and liability for the interior for the facility after construction is complete, said City Manager Sharyn Dickerson.

The city will provide assistance in costs of operations and interior maintenance and repairs for the library.

The county has agreed to continue providing the majority of the library's operational expenses via an intergovernmental contribution and coverage of electricity, explained Dickerson. The city will assist the county by sharing in covering the cost of the balance of the library's operational budget up to \$30,000 annually plus contributing 10 percent of the additional property taxes above the \$30,000 set aside.

An additional 5 percent of the remaining balance of property taxes will be set aside for future capital improvement needs. In addition, the city will be responsible for the exterior maintenance of the facility.

Oconee County will assist with preparation of solicitations for design and construction and other technical assistance like it did with the Bogart Library. The county has earmarked SPLOST funds for construction and furnishing of the library.

The MOU with the city and county will run for 20 years.



The new library building will be 25,000 square feet. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

The library system and board of trustees agree to administer a state grant of \$1.9 million. All project fund accounting will be audited according to state guidelines.

In related news, families can compete in a bake-off for the Oconee County Library June 6 through July 17. This program is open to ages 11 and up.

For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/arlgreatlibrarybakeoff>. Children and teens can earn prizes and vote on their favorite baked good.

Also, local portrait artist Broderick Flanigan will have an exhibit in the

library through August.

The Bogart Library will have farm animals Wednesday, June 16 at 11 a.m. Children can also make crafts and watch a puppet show. Registration is strongly encouraged. Register in person or via phone.

For more information about the following Bogart Library events, call (706) 310-3515 or follow the library on Facebook.

■ Virtual book talks Friday, June 11 at 2 p.m.

■ Anime Night Tuesday, June 15 at 6 p.m. This is for teens in grades 6-12 only, please.

## Bonuses, raises in the final OCS budget

**BY JULIA FECHTER**

When Oconee Board of Education votes on the fiscal year 2022 budget next Monday, the final version will include the previously discussed \$1,000 retention bonuses and dollar-per-hour raises for custodial, bus and school nutrition staff.

Chief Financial Officer Saranna Charping presented the BOE with an in-progress salary study that Tom Odom had previously requested. Charping said that the study compares salaries for custodial, bus and school nutrition personnel between Oconee and 10 other counties.

The ranking is based on staff members' years of experience and dollar-per-hour pay before and after the raise.

With the raise, bus driver salaries move up from sixth to third place in the Northeast Georgia region. Custodial salaries move from fourth down to fifth place, and pay for school nutrition staff moves up from eleventh to third place.

"I think it (the study) needs a little more work, and I don't know that it can happen all in one year but maybe over a couple of years," Odom said. "I don't think it's a tremendous amount of work (to be done), but I saw some disparities there, maybe just a little bit."

The forthcoming budget has revenues of \$86.4 million and expenditures of \$86.685 million, with a millage rate of 16.5 mills.

For the second year in a row,



Chief Financial Officer Saranna Charping presents the final tentative budget before BOE members vote on it next week. [Photo by Julia Fechter]

OCS will borrow from the general fund balance to cover a \$250,300 deficit in expenditures. This fiscal year, the district had to borrow funds to make up for a revenue shortfall of \$4.5 million caused by a state austerity cut in Quality Basic Education revenue. The fund balance is intended to help with system growth needs or any unforeseen circumstances like the pandemic and an austerity cut.

Since that amount of funding hasn't been fully restored, OCS is looking at about \$2 million less in state revenue for FY2022.

State revenue comprises \$44.1

million or 51 percent of overall incoming monies. The slightly reduced QBE still makes up 97 percent of state funds.

In terms of other state funding, OCS will receive about \$900,000 in grants for nursing and transportation-related expenses. Career, technical and ag programs will receive \$367,000 in grants, too.

Local sources will comprise \$42.3 million, or 49 percent of revenue. The Oconee tax digest is built on a tax value of \$2.488 billion, which represents a 7.16 percent increase over last year.

The property and ad valorem taxes represent \$40.2 million of local funding, with other local revenues accounting for \$3 million.

Roughly \$77 million or 91 percent of FY2022 expenses account for all personnel salary and benefits. The other \$7.6 million, or 9 percent of costs, will cover operations expenses.

Costs related to teachers, paraprofessionals and instructional services will be \$62.3 million or 71.9 percent. Expenses for improvement of instruction will be \$1.2 million or 1.4 percent.

Nurses, social workers and school psychologists will be covered with \$2.7 million or 3.1 percent of the budget. Additionally, media centers at all 11 public schools will be allocated \$1.1 million or 1.3 percent.

The school district also put in \$652,000 for seven growth positions, including a special education teacher and six regular general education teachers.

Eligible step increases for employees will cost \$815,000, and the Teachers Retirement System employee rate will cost \$450,000. There is also \$288,000 allotted for technology purchases, the first time OCS has included such expenses for growth.

Twelve-month employee work days have been decreased from 245 to 240, at no cost to the system, and employees won't receive a salary adjustment from the change.

### Capital projects

OCS is reserving \$10.5 million of the now-\$28.25 million fund balance to assist with capital outlay summer projects that will be funded by ELOST 6 and bonds. Those projects are as follows:

- OCS's third public middle school, Dove Creek Middle School
- Classroom additions to Colham Ferry, High Shoals and Malcom Bridge elementary schools
- Renovations to Oconee County Primary School and Malcom Bridge, Oconee County and Rocky Branch elementary schools
- An instructional support center
- More buses and updates to servers and wireless networks

## BOC to reduce millage

### Cost of the Eagle Tavern renovation project increases

**BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA**

The Oconee Board of Commissioners plans to roll back the millage rate this year. An exact figure has not been released, but public hearings will be held on July 6, July 27, and Aug. 3.

The BOC this month approved a Fiscal Year 2022 general fund budget of \$32.691 million. The total budget, which includes the general fund, SPLOST, special revenue and enterprise fund, is \$58.461 million.

"The budget is driven by the mission...strategic goals of smart government, smart growth, smart infrastructure and quality of life," Oconee Finance Director Wes Geddings said at a meeting.

The 2004 SPLOST fund will be used toward the forthcoming administrative building. The 2015 SPLOST will be used for several projects in addition to finishing the parks bond debt payment.

The general fund revenue of \$32.691 million is 4.62 percent higher than the previous year.

Healthcare has an 8 percent net increase. The budget includes state-of-the-art fire equipment and a new fire engine.

The fees for Oconee Parks and Rec have increased. Last year, the Oconee Board of Education decided to begin charging the county for use of school fields and gyms. At a recent BOC meeting, citizen Dan Magee thanked the BOC for not charging Oconee County Schools for use of county facilities. He said that was the right thing to do.

SEE COUNTY BUDGET PAGE A2

## Election is Tuesday

**BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA**

Early voting for the Watkinsville special election continues today and tomorrow from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Voting on election day Tuesday will run from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at City Hall.



Brodrick

Mayor-elect Brain Brodrick will appear on the ballot alongside Peter Steckel, who dropped out of the race. He provided the Oconee Elections Office with the paperwork last week.



Garrett

Council Post 1, which was vacated by Brodrick so he could run for mayor, is still contested. That race is between Chuck Garrett and Carolyn Maultsby.



Maultsby

Garrett is a native of Oconee County and the asphalt sales manager for Pittman Construction. Maultsby is a 23-year resident of Watkinsville who has served as a customer accounts officer, an executive administrative assistant and an office manager.

In addition to The Oconee Enterprise's coverage of a candidate forum last month, retired journalism professor Lee Becker has posted a video of the forum at [vimeo.com/leebecker](https://vimeo.com/leebecker).

This issue was mailed Wednesday, June 9, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

