

# YOUR OCONEE

Planning for the Future



**May 2019: Cultural Resources & Transportation**

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THE OCONEE COUNTY 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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## THE OCONEE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ...

is a state-required document that provides guidance for the county — the administration, council and private citizens — for the coming decade.

To get input from the community for the goals and strategies in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the county is producing a series of special sections to break down the data and offer you a chance to provide feedback.

This is the third of five monthly sections that will cover the 10 elements of the plan.

### Cultural Resources

Cultural resources contribute greatly to the defining character of Oconee County and its communities. This element of the comprehensive plan includes information on historic structures and buildings, festivals, entertainment venues, unique residential areas and educational and religious institutions.

Preservation and enhancement of the county's abundant historic and cultural resources directly benefit the community through increased tourism activity and revenue. It also emphasizes revitalization of core commercial and residential districts, higher property values and enhanced attractiveness to new employers and residents.

Small towns and rural communities with attractive cultural, scenic and historic resources are among the fastest-growing heritage tourism and retirement destinations. The ability of Oconee County to attract and retain visitors, retirees and professionals rests largely on the quality of life offered by a rich historic and cultural resource base.

### Transportation

This element focuses on Oconee County's transportation system, a major factor in our prosperity and way of life. The system is made up of roads, airports, railroads, mass transit routes, bicycle routes and pedestrian routes, and is owned and maintained by a mix of public and private entities.

Oconee County's location at the edge of the mountains has played a major role in the history of transportation in the county. The ridges and valleys that serve as a beautiful backdrop to the natural features that attract so many of today's visitors have also acted as an impediment to easy travel.

Even today, it is possible to see the remains of portions of many of those paths and wagon roads, winding through the hills and along the ridges, establishing the routes that much of our modern transportation system continues to follow.

So, unlike some of our neighboring counties, our transportation goals must be tempered by the knowledge that nature itself has imposed additional hurdles that, many times, make the simplest solution, in the end, less than satisfactory.

It takes  
as much  
energy to  
wish as it  
does to  
plan.

— Eleanor Roosevelt



Blue Ridge Arts Center

### Questions or comments?

You can reach Oconee County Planning Director Adam Chapman at [achapman@oconeesc.com](mailto:achapman@oconeesc.com) or (864) 364-5103.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

### Monday, June 3

Planning Commission  
6 p.m.

### Tuesday, June 4

Planning & Economic  
Development Committee  
4:30 p.m.

Real Estate, Facilities and  
Land Management Committee  
4:30 p.m.

County Council • 6 p.m.

### Monday, June 10

Agricultural Advisory Board  
6:30 p.m.

### Monday, June 17

Planning Commission  
6:00 p.m.

### Tuesday, June 18

Law Enforcement, Public Safety,  
Health and Welfare Committee  
4 p.m.

County Council • 6 p.m.

All meetings take place in council chambers at 415 S. Pine Street, Walhalla.

► **Can't make the meeting but still want to keep up?**

Oconee County meetings are recorded live and available to watch at [YouTube.com/YourOconee](https://www.youtube.com/YourOconee)



# OCONEE COUNTY CULTURAL RESOURCES

An area with deep Native American and agrarian roots, Oconee is rife with opportunities to preserve its history while expanding and embracing opportunities to celebrate it. From festivals and entertainment venues that feature traditional music to art galleries that add a splash of color, there are several ways to enjoy and relish in what makes the county stand apart from its neighbors.



Westminster Music Centre



Oconee History Museum



Oconee County is home to **4 HISTORIC DISTRICTS** and **16 HISTORIC SITES**

## HISTORICAL MARKERS

► Historical markers give recognition to places, people, events and structures that have historical significance at the local, state or national level. The *South Carolina Department of Archives and History* manages the South Carolina Historical Marker program, which includes 1,500 markers statewide, with 23+ in Oconee County.

## SCENIC CORRIDORS

► Numerous unique areas and corridors showcase the history, culture and geography of Oconee County. In addition to scenic views, these routes feature historically and culturally significant sites and the unspoiled, diverse natural character of the county. The Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway is also a National Scenic Byway that extends 112



miles along S.C. Highway 11, while the Savannah River Scenic Highway — S.C. Highway 24 — forms part of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor that extends 320 miles from the mountains of Oconee to Charleston.



This heritage corridor offers a cross-section of the state's history culture, and natural landscapes by showcasing the evolution of regional life from plantations and farms to mill villages and urban centers.

As a spur of the Falling Waters National Scenic Byway, the Oscar B. Wigington Scenic Highway — S.C. Highway 107 — is only 20 miles long



## FINE & PERFORMING ARTS CENTERS & RELATED COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- The Walhalla Performing Arts Center
- Westminster Music Centre
- Gateway Arts Center
- Oconee Community Theatre
- Upstate Heritage Quilt Trail
- Young Appalachian Musicians (*subsidiary of Preserving Our Southern Appalachian Music*)
- Blue Ridge Arts Center
- Silver Dollar Music Hall

and offers spectacular mountain views from the North Carolina border to Oconee State Park.

## LIBRARIES

► The Oconee County Public Library was established in 1948 in Walhalla. The first branch locations were added in Westminster in 1950 and

## OCONEE'S NATIONAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

### NEWRY HISTORIC DISTRICT

Listed in 1982, includes 1,818 properties in a turn-of-the-century textile mill village built between 1893 and 1910 in the Little River Valley

### OCONEE STATE PARK DISTRICT

Listed in 2004, the Civilian Conservation Corps project from the Great Depression era includes 63 contributing resources around a man-made lake

### RAM CAT ALLEY HISTORIC DISTRICT

Listed in 2000, includes 21 commercial buildings in downtown Seneca that exemplify development around the railroad systems

### SENECA HISTORIC DISTRICT

Listed in 1974 and 1987, includes two areas with three churches and 20 homes in a variety of styles, including Victorian, bungalow, Tudor revival and four-square

The  
**LOCAL HISTORY & GENEALOGY**  
collection is housed  
in the main library  
in Walhalla.

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, 2019

Property	Listed
Alexander-Cannon-Hill House (Seneca)	1972
Ellicott Rock (Salem)	1974
Faith Cabin Library (Seneca)	2012
Keil Farm (Walhalla)	1998
Long Creek Academy (Long Creek)	1987
McPhail Angus Farm (Seneca)	2007
Oconee County Cage (Walhalla)	1982
Oconee Station (Salem)	1971
Old Pickens Presbyterian Church (Seneca)	1996
Retreat Rosenwald School (Westminster)	2011
Russell House and Farmstead (Mountain Rest)	1988
Westminster Depot (Westminster)	1976
St. John's Lutheran Church (Walhalla)	1980
Stumphouse Tunnel Complex (Walhalla)	1971
Tamassee DAR School (Tamassee)	2012
Walhalla Graded School (Walhalla)	1992

SOURCE: NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, 2019

in Salem in 1952, followed by Seneca in 1953. The system also provides monthly bookmobile service to outlying rural areas.

The system had 44,959 registered patrons and 225,158 visitors in 2018.

The local history and genealogy collection is housed in the Antoinette "Ann" Rogers Memorial Room of the main library in Walhalla. The collection includes microfilm of local newspapers,



Jazz On The Alley

SOURCE: NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, 2019

music programs are provided to more than 10,400 students each year through the School District of Oconee County.

### RELATED VENUES

► Oconee County has several agricultural tourism sites and facilities that strongly complement its historic, arts and cultural resources. In addition to supporting the county's agricultural economy, agritourism attractions showcase the cultural and historical traditions of the community.

A number of local farms have diversified their operations through agritourism, incorporating farm tours and field trips, dinners, on-site farm-to-table restaurants with markets, workshops, festivals and u-pick operations.



Seneca Fest

as well as local histories, family histories, cemetery records and a small collection of local historical maps.

The libraries offer learning opportunities and community events such as movie nights, writing contests and craft workshops.

### EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

► Communities that promote a philosophy of lifelong learning among residents are better positioned to successfully compete in a global economy and benefit from a more engaged citizenry. Arts education and

## ANNUAL FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS

Issaqueena's Last Ride  
Jazz Fest

Jazz on the Alley

Wheels in Westminster

Music on Main

Westminster Bluegrass Jam

Seneca Fest

Cinco De Mayo Celebration

Long Creek Music Festival

Fun in the Sun

Hillbilly Day

Cruizin' on Main

S.C. Apple Festival

Carolina Foothills Heritage Fair

Road Titans 300

Tour de Tugaloo

Oktoberfest

Brew and 'Que

# HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

— BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON | THE JOURNAL —

If variety is the spice of life, then it's probably safe to say Oconee County has some pretty spicy roads.

From former wagon trails carved into the mountainsides to Interstate 85 at the southern end, several types of roads serve as daily commutes for Oconee's residents and workforce.

Some of that workforce includes the staff and volunteer firefighters of Oconee County Emergency Services who make trips up winding roads, state highways and interstate alike. If anyone has seen a variety of roads in nearly every muddy, sunny, ice-topped condition, it's the men and women who serve every corner of the county.

Larry Wilks, who has been chief of the Fair Play Fire Department for 26 years, has seen his fair share of wrecks and fires in his more than 30-year firefighting career.

Though the roads may have changed over the years, the biggest hazard he sees on the roadways is the drivers.

"Every time you ride down the road, you see somebody not paying attention, crossing the yellow line or blowing through stoplights just in a hurry to get where they need to be," Wilks said. "When we go to accidents, the cause is usually human error rather than mechanical failure."

When it comes to servicing the smaller roads in his area, there are several plans in place, Wilks said. They know which roads are one-lane or barely two lanes — which can be tricky to take large equipment through.

"Sometimes we have to pull in a driveway and let somebody else pass or, if we're coming through with sirens, they pull off for us to pass," Wilks said. "We do have fire plans in our area and know the various routes in subdivisions where trucks can't pass. Essentially we park the trucks where we can and hike in, but we practice getting to those areas."

Oconee County Emergency Services director Scott Krein said the variety of roads and elevations can be deceiving for many drivers, especially in inclement weather.

"You get in our mountains and there's limited visibility for roadways and driveways that come in," Krein said. "The sight distance was not designed for the speeds we may go. At least once a year, we seem to have unpredictable weather that puts us within one or two degrees of bad weather where, in the mountains, we have a lot of ice and, just down from that, everyone thinks everything's OK."

The road standards have changed a bit over the years as well, Krein said, and as roads are repaired, they're also widened and upgraded to meet new safety criteria.

While the airport plays a role in bringing people to Oconee County, another major factor in the area sees a few more issues with ground transportation. Krein said there are several train crossings in Oconee that have been problematic



"One of the big things that has changed is technology and how we make the roads better sustainable to water," Krein said. "They've designed them now so water will run off instead of pool and, in doing so, they've corrected some of those issues as they widen them."

Both men advised taking it slow — especially on unfamiliar roads or hazardous weather conditions — and heeding to emergency vehicles.

"Don't be slamming on the brakes when you see us coming," Wilks said. "Fire trucks weigh about 36,000 pounds. They don't stop nearly as quickly. Go to the side of the road, pull off if you can pull off, but don't break your vehicle. We don't want to turn around and have to pull you out of a ditch."

in the past with larger vehicles getting stuck or drivers thinking they can race across the tracks before the train arrives.

"We do have a very busy train lane that comes through Oconee," Krein said. "The East Coast transit system comes right through Oconee. You can't outrun the train, and the train can't stop."



# OCONEE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION

Planes, trains and automobiles — Oconee County has it all and then some. A strong railroad history in the area maintains its presence today, though it's rarely used for local travel. The system of public and private roads is used by pedestrians, bikers, mass transit and everyday commuters in addition to tourists visiting the area.

## NATURAL LIMITATIONS

► In spite of the development of safe, modern routes throughout the county, the geography and topography of Oconee County continue to have a major impact on travel through the area. Even the rail system that bisects the county — a part of a major route connecting the northeastern United States to the South — skirts along the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, following roughly the same course as the major road routes.

With this in mind, as we consider the status of our transportation system, there is no escaping the fact that, as important as travel is to our modern lives, there are practical limits imposed by the surroundings.

## OWNERSHIP OF ROADS

► Oconee County is served by more than 2,000 miles of roads, with 1,060 miles comprised of state and federal roads. Those maintained by the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) include 8.6 miles of Interstate 85, 50 miles of U.S. highways, 188 miles of primary state routes and 657 miles of secondary state routes.

The U.S. Forest Service maintains 156 miles of roads in the Sumter National Forest.

Oconee County currently maintains almost 1,200 miles of roads, with approximately 400 unpaved.

## ROAD CONDITIONS

► Oconee County is currently implementing a systematic approach to evaluating and prioritizing roads for maintenance activities, with safety being of the greatest concern. But the identification of those roads is only one component to improving the system, for there remain impediments to creating a comprehensive program.

Another major hurdle associated with upgrading

the road inventory is the lack of deeded road right-of-way, for in years past, many county roads were taken into the system without any. As a result, a number of roads are maintained with only prescriptive right-of-way, enabling only 'ditch-to-ditch' repairs; no upgrade of work can be performed outside of the existing boundaries of the road, prohibiting any widening that may be needed as a result of increased traffic.

## PRIVATE ROADS

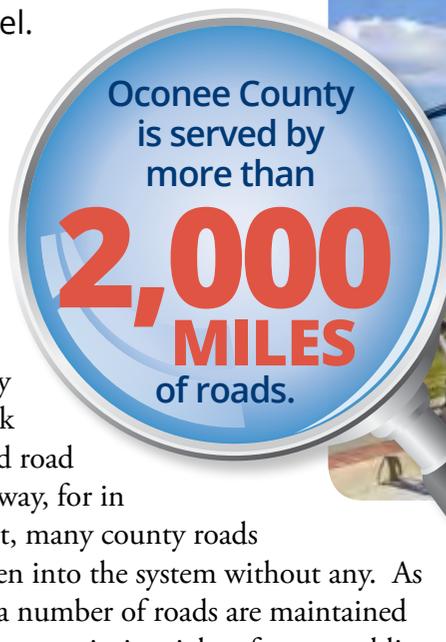
► Approximately 625 miles of privately maintained roads are located throughout Oconee

## PRIVATE ROADS

**PRIVATE DRIVEWAYS** serve 0-3 residences, have no design standards and must meet building and fire codes

**PRIVATE DRIVES** serve 4-10 residences and must have a 20-foot driving surface with 50-foot right-of-ways, appropriate signage, sight distance, and other basic requirements while meeting all applicable building and fire codes

**PRIVATE ROADS** serve 11 or more residences and must meet most standards applicable for public roads of a similar nature



County. Although most of these are primarily driveways and drives that access private neighborhoods, some are utilized as access to amenities open to the public. Few, if any, however, are considered public thoroughfares. Among the major developments that maintain their own road system are Chickasaw Point, Keowee Key and The Cliffs.

## MASS TRANSIT

► Currently, the only mass transit system serving the general public in Oconee County is the Clemson Area Transit System (CAT), which provides free bus service in and around the City of Seneca, and along U.S. 76/123 between Seneca and Clemson.

The success in Seneca has given rise to consideration of expanding the 'CAT Bus' system to the cities of Westminster and Walhalla.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

► While an adequate road system is vital for any community's health and economic wellbeing, the impact on an area's scenic attributes and lifestyle resulting from the road may result in losses that are not easily shown on a spreadsheet. As a result, although the costs of establishing a public transportation system may appear on the surface to be greater than simply adding some lanes to a road, over time, the impact on the scenic character



**ROAD, RAILWAY & AIRPORT SYSTEMS ARE VITAL to Oconee County's future**

and 'small town' feel of an area may actually cost more through lost tourism revenues.

As a result, Oconee County's transportation system, which is focused almost exclusively on transporting people in private automobiles, is limited in sustainability.

**AIRPORT**

▶ Other small airports located close by Oconee County include the Anderson Regional Airport, which is located off S.C. Highway 24, 3 miles west of the City of Anderson, South Carolina, and has 4 runways.

**AIRPORT NEEDS**

▶ The Oconee County Airport, already important to the area's economic wellbeing, is positioned to become an even greater asset. The facility, which is located near U.S. 123 in a growing area of the County, offers easy access to destinations throughout the primary development areas of the county, for both business and private customers. Also, its existing linkage with Clemson University provides a foundation for the development of even great partnership, particularly as the school expands its position as one of the premier research institutions in the nation.

**RAILROADS**

▶ Although rail service played a major role in Oconee County's growth and

development, it has declined significantly in recent decades. Currently, there are no operating passenger stations or points of access within Oconee County.

Most of the rail traffic moving through Oconee County is dedicated to freight transportation. With the main rail line that parallels U.S. 123 serving as a major artery for Norfolk Southern between Charlotte and Atlanta, many thousands of tons of freight pass through Oconee County on a daily basis. Few local businesses, however, rely

on transporting freight directly to and from their facilities by rail, for most have turned to truck transport, leaving a number of miles of secondary 'spur' rail lines seldom used.

**PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE**

▶ On the local level, as new developments and communities are planned, the existence of pedestrian and bicycle friendly routes will serve to attract the attention of developers seeking to take advantage of the growing number of people desiring to reduce the time spent in their cars. Already, the issue of designing walkable and bikeable projects in Oconee County is of growing interest for developers, with the trend expected to continue. Given the growing emphasis on physical activity and healthy lifestyles across America, projects that meet such expectations are likely to prove to be more successful than those that fail to recognize the change.





## Citizen Survey of Cultural Resources & Transportation

This survey was developed as a means of providing the county with some understanding of the things you like about Oconee County, as well as the issues that concern you. The survey is also your chance to dream a little, to give us your vision of the county's future and how you think we might arrive at that destination.

Visit [upstatetoday.com/survey](http://upstatetoday.com/survey) to submit online or drop off completed survey at your local library, *The Journal* at 210 W. North 1st Street in Seneca, or the Oconee County Planning Department at 415 S. Pine Street in Walhalla.

1. How long does it take you to reach a:	<10 mins	10-20 mins	20-30 mins	30+ mins	N/A
Full-service grocery store	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Medical facility	<input type="checkbox"/>				
School	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Work	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Restaurant	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Shopping/entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/>				

2. Do you utilize any of our four Farmers Markets? If so, which ones:
- FARM Center: Every Saturday 8 a.m.-noon, April-October (located between Seneca and Westminster)
  - Seneca Farmers Market: Tues., Thurs. & Sat. on Main Street, 8 a.m.-noon
  - Walhalla Farmers Market: Saturday 8 a.m.-noon
  - Westminster Farmers Market: June-October, Tuesdays at 4 p.m. at the depot
  - I do not go to any Farmers Markets

3. Which of the following cultural sites have you visited?
- Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum
  - General Store Museum
  - Lunney House Museum
  - Museum of the Cherokee in South Carolina
  - Patriots Hall (Oconee Veterans Museum)
  - Oconee History Museum
  - Oconee Station
  - World of Energy
  - None

4. Do you think there are enough entertainment options for the various age groups in the county?
- Yes     No

5. Do you live off of a private, county or state-owned road?
- Private
  - County
  - State
  - I don't know

### 6. What does the County need more:

- Bike Paths
- Sidewalks
- Greenways/Shared-use paths/trails  
(Swamp Rabbit / Doodle, for example)
- "Blue ways" (river trails)

7. If riding a bike along the side of the road was practical and made safe, would you ride a bike to work, school, shopping or other places around the county?
- Yes     No

8. How do you feel about the maintenance of your roads?
- Very Unsafe* *Very Safe*
- 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. Have you used the CATbus?
- Yes     No

10. If it were available to you, would you ride the CATbus?
- Yes     No

11. Would you support additional funding for Oconee County Regional Airport?
- Yes     No

YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO

# WIN \$100 just for voicing your opinion!

Submit your completed survey and be entered to win one of two \$100 Visa gift cards! Surveys must be submitted by June 12 to be eligible to win. Winners will be drawn and announced June 14.

\*Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Ph. #: \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Indicates required field so prize winners may be contacted. Personal information for contest will not be kept or sold. Must be age 18 or over to be eligible to win prize. Employees of Oconee County or The Journal and their families are ineligible. Limit of one prize per household. Please note that survey prizes are not being funded by Oconee County but have been generously donated by The Journal.

### 12. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

### 13. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

### 14. Please select the range that includes your age.

- 12 or Under
- 13-17
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 -74
- 75-84
- 85 or Older

*Additional comments/  
suggestions may be  
attached or emailed  
to [achapman@oconeesc.com](mailto:achapman@oconeesc.com)*