



# YOUR OCONEE

Planning for the Future



**June 2019: Economic Development**

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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 fourth of five monthly sections that will cover the 10 elements of the plan.

### Economic Development

Oconee County possesses the necessary assets to insure a very prosperous economic future. Its workforce has proven itself to be bright, hardworking and able to meet the requirements of a wide variety of businesses. And, with the support of the region's world-class educational and technical training system, virtually any type of operation should be able to choose from an large pool of well-qualified trainable employees.

Already, the county is home to a diversified business base, evidencing the presence of a supportive environment for operations looking to locate in the region. There is little doubt, therefore, that Oconee County has many of the basic tools in place to insure its future economic prosperity. Still, there are some challenges that will have to be overcome before the county's economic potential can be achieved.

Given existing political realities, expanding necessary infrastructure will only be accomplished with the cooperation of a number of entities. Chief among these, of course, are the area municipalities.

Too often in the past, it appears infrastructure projects have been isolated efforts. Today, the cost of development necessitates the sharing of burdens whenever possible, in the end not only both reducing redundancy of effort and the price paid by individual partners, but also magnifying the end results far beyond what could have been achieved singly.

It is imperative, therefore, for all Oconee County governmental entities to look beyond their own immediate interests and cooperate with others around them.

Of all of the potential challenges to Oconee County's future economic prosperity, perhaps the greatest will prove to be the ability of its leaders to identify, evaluate and plan for every eventuality that may impact the growth or decay of the county.

Such planning should guide all aspects of economic development — land use, infrastructure, labor force and relationships with municipalities and other governmental entities. Perhaps most critically, adopted plans should be adhered to, even when faced with options that may seem to be more politically expedient.

The establishment and maintenance of a successful economic development program involves focusing the efforts of all aspects of county government on the goal.

There are no isolated decisions. With the proper commitment in place, all other hurdles become much smaller obstacles. The power to insure Oconee County's future success in economic development therefore lies within its grasp — provided sufficient focus and backbone is found to do the job.

### Questions or Comments?

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

Give me  
six hours  
to chop  
down a tree  
and I will  
spend the  
first four  
sharpening  
the axe..

— Abraham Lincoln

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

### District Drop-Ins

Tuesday, July 6

Mountain Rest Community Club  
6 p.m.

Thursday, July 11

Salem Community Center  
6 p.m.

Thursday, July 18

Westminster Depot • 6 p.m.

Thursday, July 25

Fair-Oak Youth Center • 6 p.m.

Monday, July 1

Planning Commission • 6 p.m.

Monday, July 15

Planning Commission • 6 p.m.

Tuesday, July 16

Transportation Committee  
4:30 p.m.

County Council • 6 p.m.

Monday, July 22

Board of Zoning Appeals  
6 p.m.

Monday, August 5

Planning Commission • 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](http://YouTube.com/YourOconee)



## OCONEE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is often said that economic development lies at the intersection of public policy and the free enterprise system. Economic development includes activities as varied as improving education, quality of life, physical and technological infrastructure, business services and financial support. All those facets must come together and work cohesively toward local success and prosperity.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

▶ Economic development is a very broad subject that has many varying definitions. Here in Oconee County, economic development consists mainly of the pursuit of industrial or manufacturing "projects." These projects can either be recruiting new companies to build or working with existing companies to expand their physical footprint or upgrade their current facility with new equipment, staff or significant training. In both cases, there are many things that have to come together before growth can occur.

### OCONEE ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

▶ The Oconee Economic Alliance is a public-private nonprofit effort to accelerate job creation and capital investment, increase per capita income, diversify the local tax base and generate awareness of Oconee County as a business location.

It works with existing employers to help them grow in Oconee County and conducts efforts to attract new companies to locate here. From product development to workforce improvement strategies, the OEA team works with various community partners to enhance the area's desirability for businesses and residents.

### RECENT INVESTMENTS

▶ Since 2012, the Oconee Economic Alliance has ushered in 38 economic development projects that have brought in more than \$501 million in capital investment and 1,591 new jobs.

In 2018 alone, Oconee County saw more than \$69 million new, taxable investment, added a "workforce development campus" and installed wayfinding signs throughout the county. In 2017, the capital investment total was \$153,229,800.

### WORKFORCE

▶ As Oconee's population ages, economic development must also focus on retaining its younger workforce to fill the jobs created by bringing in new industry. The median age of the county is increasing faster than most areas due to its attractiveness for retirees.

Available labor, especially skilled labor, is considered to be a key driver in site selection decisions. Workers are often the lifeblood for a company's operation.

### LABOR SHED

▶ Oconee's labor shed population comes from 11 neighboring counties and totals nearly 289,000 people. Within that area, there are roughly 9,600 unemployed residents, 2,600 of whom have a manufacturing background.

A 2016 study showed Oconee County residents was drawing roughly 2,400 workers from Pickens County and 2,000 from Anderson County, but nearly 3,000 Oconee residents were making the daily commute to Pickens and 3,400 were traveling to Greenville County for work.

### EMPLOYMENT

▶ Manufacturing accounts for most of the county's jobs, totaling more than 6,000 people in its workforce. There are more than 60 manufacturers in the county who provide jobs for Oconee residents and their neighbors.

As of April 2019, Oconee County's unemployment rate was 2.8 percent, translating to roughly 2,000 people without work. In 2010, that number was 9.6 percent, meaning around 7,100 residents weren't working.

### INDUSTRIAL PARKS

▶ Oconee County owns property at three

## OCONEE COUNTY'S TOP 10 EMPLOYERS

**BorgWarner**

BorgWarner: 970 employees

**Itron**

Itron: 930 employees

**Koyo**

Koyo: 580 employees

**Schneider Electric**

Schneider Electric: 550 employees

**BASF**

BASF: 400 employees

**US ENGINE VALVE**

US Engine Valve: 380 employees

**GREENFIELD INDUSTRIES**

Greenfield Industries: 350 employees

**SANDVIK**

Sandvik: 300 employees

**CLARIOS**

Clarios: 240 employees

**BAXTER ENTERPRISES**

Baxter Enterprises: 180 employees





Hamilton Career Center



Tri-County Technical College

### OCONEE COUNTY FAST FACTS

Oconee's total population	77,725
Labor force*	35,700
Employed in manufacturing	6,000+
Unemployed population*	2,000
Median household income	\$42,876

\*As of April 2019

separate industrial parks throughout the county. Each is a S.C. Certified Industrial Park, has a master plan and infrastructure on site, helping make them more marketable to industries looking for a new home.

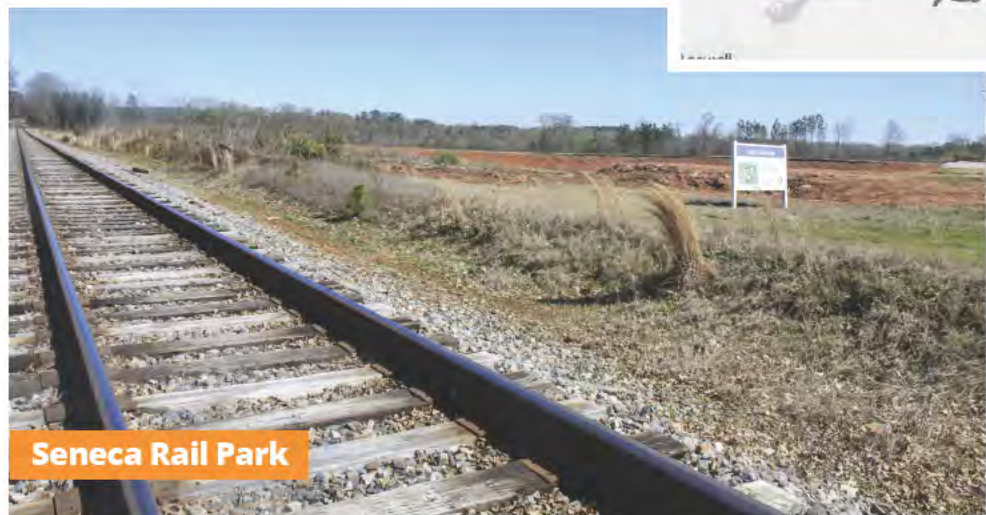
#### GOLDEN CORNER COMMERCE PARK

► Located in Fair Play, the Golden Corner Commerce Park has more than 260 buildable acres of county-owned land. It is the state's closest industrial park to Atlanta and is only 2 miles from Interstate 85.

It is a S.C. Certified Industrial Park and has infrastructure on site, including a fiber optic network. Oconee County purchased this park in 2005 for a little more than \$2.3 million.

#### SENECA RAIL PARK

► Just outside the city limits of Seneca, the Seneca Rail Park is comprised of 82 acres in



Seneca Rail Park

an Opportunity Zone. It offers rail service via Norfolk Southern and is only 5 minutes from U.S. Highway 123.



Oconee's Labor Shed

Oconee County officials were notified in May that the county has been awarded a \$500,000 S.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority grant for water and sewer lines, bringing the total dollar investment close to \$6 million.

#### OCONEE INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY PARK

► Home to Tri-County Technical College and Baxter Hi-Tech mold and the future space of the Hamilton Career Center and Horton Industries, Oconee County Industry and Technology Park has more than 406 acres to its name.

It is an S.C. Certified Industrial Park located off U.S. Highway 11 and only 2 miles from U.S. Highway 123, offering quick access to Westminster, Seneca and Walhalla. The county spent around \$2.5 million on the land and development of infrastructure at OITP, which has flourished since its 2010 purchase.



GOLDEN CORNER COMMERCE PARK  
FUTURE HOME OF...  
...BUSINESSES  
...JOBS  
CALL 864-638-4210

# COMING HOME

Plant manager returns to Oconee County

— BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON | THE JOURNAL —

Despite a recent promotion and a move to Music City, Stephen Scruggs couldn't wait to come home to Oconee County when the opportunity unexpectedly presented itself.

When he received an offer to be the plant manager at Schneider Electric's Seneca plant, Scruggs packed his bags and left Nashville, Tenn., after only three months. It was the answer to a lot of prayers, he said, to live in his childhood hometown.

A nearly 30-year career in manufacturing — most of which was in the Golden Corner — means Scruggs has worked his fair share of positions and watched the industry adopt new technologies.

"This was an unexpected opening that presented itself, but the leadership team knew of my passion for being here at this plant and in this community," Scruggs said. "We've got one of the strongest workforces in Oconee County. The people here are eager to learn, and they're very flexible. As technology changes, they're very open to learning and applying the skills they learn."

Aside from the mountains and lakes that offer a wealth of recreation opportunities, Scruggs said the reason he came home was the people — and not just those inside the doors of Schneider.

"I like the (Oconee Economic Alliance) and the team that we work with," Scruggs said. "We leverage each other in the business community. I



SAVANNAH BLAKE | THE JOURNAL

Above: A Seneca High School graduate who started his manufacturing career at 18, Stephen Scruggs recently returned to Oconee County to be the plant manager at Schneider Electric in Seneca. • At left: Third shift supervisor, Stephen Scruggs (left), discusses workflow with Gary Moss.

see that as a really strong strength. There may be another business within the county that can be a solution provider for our business, and not only do we leverage each other, we get stronger as a community at the same time."

But it's not just fellow manufacturers and those tasked with assisting and promoting the industry who participate in supporting the businesses, he said. It's the community as a whole.

"The community government is really a partner in the industrial segment," he said. "I love the fact that we've got a (Tri-County Technical College) campus literally five minutes from here now. It and the new Hamilton Career Center ...

are feeders into the industrial business, which is really what's on the horizon for Oconee County."

While many may associate the manufacturing industry with thankless factory jobs, Scruggs said company morale and philosophies could be surprises for outsiders. At Schneider, he works to maintain a solid team network so employees at every level feel they're "part of something bigger," which is one of the things that first attracted him to manufacturing.

"You're starting with raw material and making a finished product. You see the process through from start to finish," he said. "It was very rewarding to see the results of your efforts."

Despite not knowing what he wanted to do after high school, Scruggs said he's found the manufacturing sector to be even more exciting as companies grow and find

better ways to serve their customers all over the world. "We're a global company, so we ship product across the globe. Our customers are throughout North America and beyond," he said. "I think it's more about taking the service and the quality, and giving our customers what they want when they want it."

Oconee is poised and ready to offer growth on a global level, he said, with its emphasis on workforce and industrial parks.

"As the economy becomes more global, you've got to have transportation and logistics to support industry and business," he said. "Obviously, the infrastructure with the transportation industry and how that network will work with Oconee County is a concern. I think the challenges will continue to be how we educate our team of employees with technology changing so quickly and trying to be proactive with that. That part of growth never goes away."





# OCONEE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## GRANTS

▶ Since 2010, more than \$10 million in grant money has been applied toward economic development in the county. This includes adding crucial infrastructure to industrial parks, improving the physical footprint of the parks and marketing Oconee County to potential developers.

Since 2010, more than **\$10 MILLION** has been applied toward economic development in the county.

## CAPITAL INVESTMENT

▶ Industrial capital investment in equipment, buildings, and land is an important contributor to the local economy, yielding more tax revenue per investment dollar to schools and local governments than residential and commercial development. The economic multiplier for manufacturing industries is typically

much higher than for retail, health services, and personal business services.

Efforts to recruit new employers to the county have targeted industries in bioscience, energy, automotive, and advanced manufacturing. Oconee County has also experienced industrial employment growth through international investment. Oconee is now home to facilities of companies based in Belgium, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico and Sweden.

## MILLAGE

▶ The county's base millage rate for 2018 was 71, with a value of one mil at \$559,921. This base rate covers county operations, debt service, economic development, Tri-County Technical College operations and bridge and road maintenance.

## PROPERTY TAXES

▶ The value of the property tax base impacts the ability of the County and its municipalities to provide vital services and facilities and to make the necessary public investments to encourage private investment. Property taxes are also the leading source of revenue for local governments. In 2018, the top 10 manufacturing employers

**THE COUNTY'S HIGHEST SINGLE CAPITAL INVESTMENT to date was the \$73 million expansion of the BorgWarner facility in Seneca in 2018.**

in the county paid roughly \$5.3 million dollars in taxes to Oconee County.

## INCENTIVES

▶ Public investments and incentives, when part of a well-planned development strategy, can provide an attractive business climate and increase private investment. The state and county can provide multiple tax incentives to existing and new businesses to encourage economic growth and investment. Among the strongest incentives available to state and local economic developers are the jobs tax credit, the fee-in-lieu of property taxes, and job development and retraining credits. Because the state does not tax real or personal property, property tax incentives must be implemented in conjunction with each county.

## REGIONAL ALLIANCE

▶ To overcome certain local challenges, Oconee County joined the Upstate SC Alliance, a 10-county partnership of community leaders, developers and private companies. Formed in 2000, the Upstate South Carolina Alliance is a public/private regional economic



VALUE OF A MIL IN 2018	
Anderson County	\$744,000
Cherokee County	\$172,125
Greenville County	\$2,230,170
Oconee County	\$559,921
Pickens County	\$500,486
Spartanburg County	\$1,150,900

**37<sup>TH</sup>**

Where South Carolina ranks nationally in terms of its overall business tax climate and 15th for favorable corporate tax structure. (2018 State Business Tax Climate Index)

**OCONEE COUNTY** had nearly \$2 billion in gross retail sales and more than \$558 million in net taxable sales in 2016, **RANKING AMONG THE TOP 20 COUNTIES IN THE STATE.**

development organization designed to market and promote the dynamic, commerce-rich, northwestern corner of South Carolina. Its mission is to position the Upstate to excel in the global economy through strategic marketing, collaboration and thought leadership. It works with our local economic developers, investors and the South Carolina Department of Commerce to move business forward in the Upstate.

Resources alone do not make Oconee a destination. Investment in public access points, tourism infrastructure, marketing and downtown development in Oconee's communities will provide for top-quality visitor amenities and services. By doing so, Oconee can become a one-of-a-kind outdoor recreation destination for the southeastern United States. It will require leadership from elected officials, collaboration among the public and private sectors and an understanding by the residents that local investment is crucial.

Destination Oconee is a road map for the future — it encompasses all geographical areas of the county and touches everyone in the county in one way or another. Its goals are to capitalize on the abundance of our natural resources, promote the uniqueness of Oconee's downtown areas, create a strong "sense of place" and a distinct, cohesive destination and to focus on quality of life as the driving force.

## TOURISM

▶ Oconee County is blessed with an abundance of natural resources that are already utilized for outdoor recreation, yet it is falling short as a recognized outdoor recreation destination. Just as Charleston, has become the premier historic destination of South Carolina, Oconee has the ability to surface as the premier outdoor recreation destination for the state.

## DESTINATION OCONEE

▶ This is a "tourism/destination marketing strategy" with the purpose of showcasing the natural assets of our county and building upon them. Destination Oconee is a driving force to enhance the economic climate within our county and accelerate efforts to continue to make the area one of the leading tourist destinations in South Carolina.

## THINK OCONEE

▶ Originally a buy local campaign challenging Oconee citizens to consciously focus their spending habits toward local business, Think Oconee has grown into a way of life. Established in October 2016, it now not only challenges natives to think, buy, and give locally, it also challenges South Carolinians, Georgians, and North Carolinians alike, to think Oconee when they travel. The driving force behind this campaign was the Destination Oconee plan.

Oconee County benefitted from **>\$64 MILLION** in travel and tourism related expenditures, with \$3.3 million in local tax revenues in 2017.



**Nearly 2,000 acres are for industrial use, less than 1% of the county's land. Commercial land uses account for almost 2% of the county's land area at 7,211 acres.**





## Citizen Survey of Economic Development

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. When it comes to growth and development, what is the county's greatest challenge?

- Providing adequate job opportunities
- Providing a suitable range of housing options
- Protecting natural resources
- Protecting small town character
- Providing adequate community amenities (parks, education, etc.)
- No opinion
- Other

### 2. What type of development is most needed?

- Increased commercial uses
- More housing
- Increased industrial uses
- No opinion
- Other

### 3. Which capital improvements should the county prioritize? (Select top three)

- Road improvements
- Internet
- Water and sewer
- Parks and recreation
- Industrial parks
- No opinion
- Other

### 4. What should be the top economic development priority?

- Creating and expanding recreation and tourism
- Recruiting new manufacturing

- Recruiting student housing
- Recruiting new commercial business
- Recruiting new entertainment options

### 5. If you wanted to find a job in Oconee County today, would you be able to work in an industry that interests you?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

### 6. How many career opportunities do you think exist for our high school, vocational school and technical college graduates?

None Many

1      2      3      4      5

### 7. There are a number restaurants, agritourism options, hardware stores, salons, boutiques and other commercial and industrial establishments that call Oconee County home. Do you "shop local" when it is available?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

### 8. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

### 9. What is your gender?

- Male     Female

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.

### 10. 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)*