



# 2022 OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL PRIORITIES



## Oconee County Mission Statement

It is the mission of Oconee County to provide our current and future citizens and visitors quality services while protecting our communities, heritage, environment and natural resources, in an ever-changing world.

## Oconee County Vision Statement

Oconee County – A diverse, growing, safe, vibrant community guided by rural traditions and shaped by natural beauty; where employment, education and recreation offer a rich quality of life for all generations, both today and tomorrow.

## County Council Priorities

Each year, County Council and Administration hold a Strategic Planning Retreat to review the previous year's accomplishments, establish goals for the upcoming year, and prioritize longer term goals in preparation for the future. The Oconee County Strategic Planning Retreat was held on Friday, February 18, 2022. During the retreat, County Administrator, Amanda Brock, presented the Annual Budget Update, followed by the 2022 Annual Report.

In round-table format, Council discussed their individual and collective strategic initiatives for the upcoming year. This discussion revealed a primary focus core government and citizen services, increasing public safety personnel, and well as improving existing critical infrastructure. Further initiatives included expansion of economic development opportunities and County employee retention and recruitment.

The strategic planning initiatives are ranked based on Council member commitment to a specific matter, and further discussion.

## Tier One Priorities

This year, Tier One initiatives were prioritized by all five (5) Council members during the Strategic Planning Retreat. These projects will receive primary staff commitment and funding consideration in the next fiscal year.

**Roadway Infrastructure:** Every Council member prioritized maintenance of County roadways, and the importance of utilizing State and local funds as much as possible for necessary improvements.

*Oconee County Roads and Bridges maintains 660 miles of roadways, dozens of bridges and hundreds of culverts throughout the county. Oconee County has designated millage for both road maintenance [2.1 mils = \$1.13 million] and a capital fund for bridges and culverts [1.1 mil = \$625,000], in addition to the General Fund allocations [\$2.9 million] for the departmental staffing, operations, and fuel and maintenance on equipment. The Roads and Bridges Department completed more than 3,000 work orders last year.*

***Priority Plan:*** Continue providing adequate funding resources for county-maintained roadways, as well as culverts and bridges.

***Priority Partners:*** Through the use of the Oconee County Council Transportation Committee, establish a roadway repair / upgrade priority list for submission to the South Carolina Department of Transportation for the maintenance of state-maintained highways. Additionally, staff will consistently work through the C-Fund Committee for continued improvements to the county's roadways.

***Recommendation:*** Maintain current funding for roadway, bridge and culvert maintenance. Develop a prioritized list of state-maintained roadways through the Oconee County Transportation Committee for submission to the SC Department of Transportation. Continue to work with the C-Fund Committee to maximize state-allocated funding for road infrastructure improvement measures.

**Wages / Employee Salaries:** Council recognizes the need for wage increases for both law enforcement staff and county employees as a priority for employee retention and recruitment.

***Priority Plan:** Administration and staff will formulate a funding plan to increase entry level salaries comparable to scale for law enforcement officers. Additionally, a step and scale matrix, with confirmed funding resources, will be presented to Council for discussion, approval and adoption. The adoption of such matrix would alleviate inconsistencies in wage and salary administration and annual funding. Additionally, allow for one-time allocations for specialized training for job functions; or allow for in-step promotions within grade to incentivize staff training and increased expertise.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval and adoption of a step and scale matrix. Approve for increased salaries for entry level positions for law enforcement and general county positions. Include in budget departmental allocations for education and cross training efforts. If approved, Administration will present potential funding resources during the annual budget process.*

**Sewer Expansion:** Each Council member stressed the importance of sewer expansion for the citizens of Oconee County and future economic development. The I-85 Exit 4 expansion of Sewer South continues to be a Council priority. The failure of adequate sewer infrastructure county-wide was also discussed.

***Priority Plan:** Administration and staff, in partnership with the OJRSA, will commit every effort in the speedy and efficient completion of the US EDA / SC Department of Commerce grant designated for Phase II of Sewer South.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval of designated funding for engineering, design and permitting for the final phase of Sewer South which routes north from current phase to Exit 4 and the surrounding basin. If approved, Administration will present potential funding resources during the annual budget process.*

**Solid Waste Facilities Improvements:** Three Council members prioritized improvement and expansion of the County's most heavily utilized Recycling Centers, including the addition of brown goods compactor units. Prioritized projects may include the purchase of property for expansion and research / implementation of additional solid waste management solutions.

***Priority Plan:** Administration and staff will identify appropriate existing recycling center locations for the expansion of furniture (brown goods) compactors while simultaneously formulating a solid waste expansion plan for the county's busiest recycling centers.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval of designated funding for brown goods compactor units for appropriate centers. Upon approval of this option, Administration will present funding resources during the annual budget process.*

**Utica Revitalization:** Council recognized the progress made in the Utica area over the past few years and reiterated that there is still much to accomplish. Four Council initiatives addressed opportunities for public and private investment, community improvement measures and the exploration of a partnership with Blue Ridge Community Center.

***Priority Plan:** Administration and staff will continue community stimulation and blight removal efforts in the Utica community; participate in community improvement meetings; and search for viable opportunities for development of public-private partnerships. Administration and staff will also identify and present a funding plan for the expansion of lighting resources and community safety infrastructure. Law enforcement salaries and recruitment efforts will contribute to increased law enforcement presence, thus a reduction in potential criminal behaviors.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval of staff resources for continued research and participation in community improvement measures. Each area of potential improvement will be brought back to council for discussion and approval of funding sources.*

## Tier Two Priorities

Tier Two priorities were identified by at least two Council members during the Strategic Planning Retreat. Staff will research and present the cost and implementation of each of the priorities throughout the 2022-2023 budget year.

**Additional (3) Oconee County Sheriff's Deputies:** The Council initiative prioritizes funding three (3) additional Deputy I positions for Oconee County Sheriff's Office, in accordance with the previous three years' plan to increase the number of officers per capita.

*Priority Plan: Include funding in the FY2022-2023 Budget for three Deputy I positions.*

*Recommendation: Council approval of funding for the additional Deputy I positions.*

**Oconee Regional Airport Hangar Construction:** Two Council members' initiatives addressed the desire for construction of T-Hangars for increased revenue and future expansion at Oconee Regional Airport.

*Priority Plan: Administration and staff will work, potentially with consultants, to identify potential site placement for additional hangars at the Oconee County Regional Airport.*

*Recommendation: Council approval for staff to work either independently or with consultants to identify potential sites for additional hangars adjacent to current airport property. If approved, options will be brought back to council for discussion and approval of funding resources. Associated costs may include land acquisition(s).*

**Broadband Expansion:** Council members expressed their support for the continued expansion of broadband connectivity to the rural areas of the County.

*Priority Plan: Consistently work with providers in the expansion of broadband connectivity in the County.*

*Recommendation: Council direction to authorize staff to, when necessary, work with providers in the expansion of broadband connectivity in the County.*

## Tier Three Priorities

Tier Three initiatives were prioritized by only one member of County Council during the strategic planning meeting, and were briefly discussed throughout the retreat.

**Fair Play School Demolition:** The Council initiative addresses the need for the demolition of the Fair Play School due to the deteriorating condition of the existing structure.

*Caveat: Oconee County does not own the former Fair Play School, and thus has no rights to demolish the structure(s) or clean up the property.*

*Plan: None at this time.*

*Recommendation: None at this time.*

**Additional Code Enforcement Officer:** This Council initiative prioritizes the need for an additional code enforcement officer to resolve back-logged and current code enforcement issues. An additional code enforcement officer would relieve the need to have a deputy on certain calls, thus freeing up a law enforcement officer for law enforcement matters.

*Priority Plan: Include funding in the FY2022-2023 Budget for the Code Enforcement Officer position.*

*Recommendation: Council approval of funding for the additional Code Enforcement Officer position.*

**County-Wide Blight Control:** The Council initiative identified the need for the removal of derelict or abandoned structures for general public safety and beautification of Oconee County.

***Priority Plan:** Administration and staff will research existing [regional] local government plans that outline criteria; funding; and results for council consideration and possible funding. Oconee County's plan may not be completed prior to the FY2022-2023 budget, therefore budget allocations for such may be requested throughout the fiscal year.*

***Recommendation:** Council direction for staff to investigate existing blight control measures in the region, and report back to Council possible solutions specific to Oconee County.*

**Communications Specialist / Public Information Officer:** The Council initiative addressed council's desire for a communications specialist to distribute information to the public via various mediums, including the Oconee County website, social media sites, and media outlets.

***Priority Plan:** Upon Council approval, include funding for a Communications Specialist / Public Information Officer position in the FY2022-2023 budget.*

***Recommendation:** Council direction to provide funding in the FY2022-2023 budget for a Communications Specialist / Public Information Officer position.*

**Master Plan for Chau Ram County Park:** This priority focused on the necessity of a Master Plan for future improvements at Chau Ram County Park. This discussion included the requirement for an additional park ranger to provide staffing resources as park usage has increased exponentially over the past five.

***Priority Plan:** Procure the necessary resources for the development of a Master Plan for Chau Ram Park, which will be funded through local ATAX and designated millage revenue. Additionally, include funding in the FY2022-2023 budget for a Park Ranger position.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval for the allocation of available funding from ATAX and designated millage revenues for the formulation of the Chau Ram County Park Master Plan; AND Council direction to allocate funding for a Park Ranger position for Chau Ram.*

**Greenway Development Plan:** For the second year, Council discussed their desire for development of a greenway trail system within Oconee County. This year's discussion emphasized utilizing grant funding, both federal and state, for the development of greenways.

***Priority Plan:** Council approved \$75,000 in the current years' budget for a Greenway Feasibility Study. Upon approval, staff will initiate the steps required to initiate the feasibility study as proposed in the current year budget.*

***Recommendation:** Council approval for staff to initiate required steps for the Greenway Feasibility Study as approved in the FY2021-2022 budget.*

**Increased District Recreation Funding:** This initiative emphasized the importance of recreation for the youth within the five (5) recreation districts in the County. The proposed allocation request increases funding from \$30,000 to \$50,000, for each district for recreation purposes.

***Priority Plan:** Upon Council approval, increase direct funding to the five recreation districts within the County to \$50,000.*

***Recommendation:** Council consideration of increased funding to the five recreational districts to \$50,000.*

**Financial Support for FARM Center / Local Food Producers:** This priority was focused on the support local food producers, farmers and agricultural non-profits need to be successful. Additionally, one Council member recommended funding the Foothills Agriculture and Research Market [FARM] Center annually in the amount of \$150,000.

*Priority Plan: Upon Council approval, allocate funding resources to support local food producers and allocate \$150,000 in the FY2022-2023 budget for the FARM Center.*

*Recommendation: Council discuss and consider funding resources to support local food producers and the recommendation of \$150,000 in the FY2022-2023 budget for the FARM Center.*

**Golden Corner Commerce Park Site Improvements:** This initiative, anchored in Council's desire to stimulate economic development, addresses infrastructure and general site improvements at GCCP to enhance future recruitment of industry.

*Priority Plan: Administration and staff will investigate grants and other viable funding resources for planning, engineering, permitting and ultimately project mobilization for both roadway improvements and mass grading within the GCCP.*

*Recommendation: Council approval for staff to begin the process of funding identification for infrastructure improvements at the Golden Corner Commerce Park.*