



Shannon K. Whitfield
Sole Commissioner
Walker County, GA

My fellow citizens,

It is my continuing honor to serve you. It's no secret, the past few years have been financially challenging for Walker County. We've shared the sacrifices necessary to restore our county's financial credibility, while living within our means. Our county is beginning to be rewarded for those sacrifices, which is why I'm delighted to provide this progress report.

PUBLIC HEALTH FACILITIES FEE ELIMINATED

When you compare the enclosed tax bill with the one you received last year, you'll notice the fee to repay Erlanger has been eliminated. Having successfully negotiated a payment plan with no interest, no court costs and no legal fees, we have enough funding to meet this obligation after two tax cycles. For property valued at \$100,000, removal of the Erlanger fee reduces the tax bill by \$140.

SLIGHT REDUCTION IN THE MILLAGE RATE

Walker County Government reduced the millage rate slightly this year. The new rate of 9.822 mills for Walker County residents in unincorporated areas represents a 0.16% reduction in county taxes, while city residents will experience a 0.28% decrease, as the incorporated rate has been set at 13.293 mills. Changes made by other taxing authorities or an increase in the assessed value of your property may impact your overall bill.

BOND REFINANCE TO SAVE TAXPAYERS OVER \$3.9 MILLION

Over the summer, we refinanced a 2015 bond that was issued for completion of the Walker County Industrial Park. In 2015, the county's credit was given "junk" status by rating analysts, which resulted in a high interest rate and increased fees.

In August, Moody's Investor Services assigned an A1 credit rating to Walker County for the bond refinance. Moody's based its rating on "the county's recovering financial position." **We've included a letter from the bond agent with this report explaining the significance of this action.** The improved credit rating helped the underwriter sell the refinanced bonds at a rate of 2.64%, a significant improvement over the 5.20% rate for the 2015 bonds.

This refinance reduced the term on this bond by nearly five years, and will save taxpayers \$3,921,475.

WE COMPLETED FISCAL 2019 WITHOUT THE NEED FOR A TAX ANTICIPATION NOTE

In January 2017, Walker County faced an \$8 million shortfall in operating expenses for the year. The county addressed the financial crisis by adjusting the millage rate, cutting expenses, improving efficiencies and using an \$8 million Tax Anticipation Note (TAN), or line of credit. We paid off the TAN early on December 22, 2017.

Last year, the county obtained a \$6 million TAN, but only needed \$1 million from that line of credit to cover expenses through November 2018.

This year, I am happy to report that we did **NOT** need a TAN to meet our day to day operational expenses, which also means we did not incur any fees or interest charges.

I am also excited to share with you that by remaining disciplined, county government has reduced our inherited debt from \$70 million to \$44.6 million, a 36.3% debt reduction in just 32 months.

ROADS BEING PAVED IN 2019 AND 2020

Thanks to voters approving TSPLOST, several roads were paved this summer. Peavine Road, East Long Hollow, Ringgold Road, Five Points Road and Five Points Spur, Osburn Road and Osburn Court, South Dick Creek Road, South Burnt Mill Road, Glass Mill Road and Jones Road have already been completed. Dry Valley Road and West Schmitt Road will be resurfaced this year. Once complete, over 30 miles of county roads will have been paved with TSPLOST dollars!

The list of roads planned for paving in 2020 will be announced before the end of this year.

WALKER COUNTY MAINTAINS AN ISO RATING IN THE TOP 12% OF THE COUNTRY

Walker County maintained a 3/3Y ISO rating following a rigorous review of fire services in the unincorporated areas of the county and city of Chickamauga. The 3/3Y classification by the Insurance Service Office benefits homeowners and business owners, since insurance companies use ISO ratings in their calculations to determine insurance rates in a community.

The ISO 3 rating, which is good for four years, places Walker County in the Top 12% in the nation for fire protection, ahead of more than 37,800 other cities and counties.

CALL WALKER COUNTY FIRE RESCUE FOR FREE SMOKE ALARMS

Walker County Fire Rescue has been focused on preventing fire related deaths by installing free smoke alarms. If you need one, please call 706-539-1255 and press 1. Our firefighters will come to your home and set them up for you for free. There are no income restrictions. Our team has already installed over 600 smoke alarms in 2019.

TIRE AMNESTY DAY RETURNS NOVEMBER 2ND

Walker County began offering tire amnesty days in 2017. Since then, 21,217 tires have been removed from the community. 629 residents took advantage of the program earlier this year, discarding 8,933 tires at the landfill for free! Due to the success of this year's event, we scheduled another one for November 2nd. Stay tuned to our website and facebook page for details.

ANIMAL CARE SERVICES AT THE AG CENTER IN OCTOBER

My Kids Have Paws Veterinary Services will be providing low cost vaccines and low cost spay and neuter services for your pets at the Walker County Ag Center on October 8th, 16th and 29th. Additional information will be posted on our website and facebook page in advance of the first event.

STAY INFORMED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

We strive to provide you with accurate and dependable information. Please visit walkercountyga.gov, follow us on Facebook, subscribe to our e-newsletter, Youtube channel or podcast and download the SirenGPS app for your smartphone to receive weather alerts and community notifications.

It continues to be my honor to serve as your last Sole Commissioner. All of us working together will bring new opportunities in 2020 and will keep the county we share moving forward.

Sincerely,



Shannon K. Whitfield
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