

**OCONEE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
TOWN HALL MEETING  
March 24, 2021 – 6:00 p.m.  
Oconee Civic Center**

**Members Present:**

Chairman John Daniell  
Commissioner Chuck Horton  
Commissioner Amrey Harden  
Commissioner Mark Saxon

**Members Absent:**

Commissioner Mark Thomas

**Staff Present:**

Justin Kirouac, County Administrator  
Kathy Hayes, County Clerk  
Alex Newell, Internal Services Director  
Diane Baggett, Communications Manager  
Shawn Wheeler, Civic Center Director  
Ed Carson, Coroner  
C.J. Worden, EMA Director  
Lisa Davol, Parks & Recreation Director

**Call to Order:** 6:00 p.m.

Chairman John Daniell welcomed citizens to the Town Hall Meeting and asked that those attending via Zoom use the raised-hand feature for comments.

**Citizen Questions:**

Jeff Hood, Julian Court, asked for an update regarding the Mars Hill Road Widening Project, Phase II, from Butlers Crossing to the Highway 441 overpass bridge. *Chairman Daniell* responded that the contract has been awarded to ER Snell and should be mobilizing in the next 30-60 days and the project will take about two years to finish.

*Chairman Daniell* stated there are additional projects forthcoming with the Georgia Department of Transportation:

- Oconee Connector interchange at Virgil Langford will be a flyover and Jimmy Daniel Road will be a full interchange. These two projects have been “bundled” and will be completed in 2024 through 2027.
- Julian Drive will be a flyover and is scheduled for 2028.
- Mars Hill Road flyover is scheduled for 2027.
- McNutt Creek Road is a flyover scheduled for 2026.
- Dials Mill Road and Dials Mill Extension may possibly be a flyover/interchange and is scheduled for 2024 and 2025.

Other projects:

- State Route 53/Rocky Branch Road/Snows Mill Road and State Route 53/Malcom Bridge Road/Rays Church Road are scheduled for Roundabouts. Engineering is underway at this time.

- We are working with DOT regarding the intersection at Union Church Road and Highway 53 to bring before the Board in the next 30 days.
- Roadside mowing has been outsourced.
- The Keep Oconee County Beautiful Commission has scheduled four additional litter pickups through community service workers from the Sheriff's Office.
- Roadway lanes on Hog Mountain Road will be extended to 12 feet.
- The off ramp at Ten Loop and Highway 316 (at the Waffle House on Epps Bridge Road) is scheduled to be awarded to allow for an additional turn lane.
- Upgrade to the E-911 System.
- Animal Services remodel and expansion projects are under construction.

Jeff Hood:

- Realtor.com shows the average median price in February for a home in Oconee County as \$398,000. Mr. Hood spoke with a Realtor who thinks there will be an increase to the median price range of \$420,000 in March and \$450,000 in April. Mr. Hood asked the Board members to comment regarding the financial ability of future generations to afford a starter home in the county. *Chairman Daniell* - Home prices are not set by the Board and that other real estate markets are experiencing an increase in home prices.
- Please update the cut-through road at Cole Springs Road and will it be permanently closed? *Chairman Daniell* – Decision will be made in the fall of 2021.
- What is the future of the School House at Heritage Park? *Chairman Daniell* – An engineer has examined all county historical sites. Currently, the foundation of the Eagle Tavern is being repaired with SPLOST 2009 funds. There are structural issues with the School House. The main focus at this time is be sure these structures are maintained for future generations and are structurally sound.
- How is the communication with the new Sheriff? *Chairman Daniell* – Excellent.
- The State General Assembly is in session. Does Oconee County have any requests being processed by our State Legislators? *Chairman Daniell* – None at this time. Commissioner Saxon is a member of the ACCG Policy Committee and receives updates each week regarding bills throughout the State.
- What revisions have been made to the rezone that will include Publix? *Chairman Daniell* – Board members are not allowed to comment as it would be inappropriate. The Planning Commission will hear the project and then the project will be brought to the Board of Commissioners.
- The Department of Transportation will begin widening Highway 441 in Morgan County. What will Oconee citizens see in the Heritage Park area and will it go around Bishop? *Chairman Daniell* – Construction is scheduled for late 2027-2028 in Oconee and there will be four lanes to the Bishop town limits.
- With the election of a new District Attorney, support seems to be increasing for Oconee to break off from Athens-Clarke County in the Western Judicial Circuit. Would you be in support of separating from Athens-Clarke County? *Chairman Daniell* – We received a lot of comments. A study of the Western Judicial Circuit would need to be completed and determine if the caseload is sufficient to allow a split. It would be sent to the State Legislature for a review.
- Regarding the recent shooting at a local convenience store, would you like to comment about the investigation? *Chairman Daniell* – The Board supports the Sheriff's Office and their investigation. *Commissioner Harden* – This was a senseless loss of a young man's life, but citizens come together with an outpouring of love and concern for families in times of tragedy. Thank you to everyone that has supported the Sheriff's Office and family.

- Is there an update on high speed internet? *Chairman Daniell* – Partnership is moving forward. The latest federal stimulus includes funds for counties with an estimated \$7.8 million being available for Oconee County. The County is waiting as to how the funds may be allocated. *Chairman Daniell* asked that citizens attend the State of the County on March 31<sup>st</sup> at the Civic Center.
- Are there new retail or manufacturing businesses coming to Oconee County? *Chairman Daniell* – At this time, there are none. *Commissioner Horton* – The Board will keep citizens informed should a new retail/commercial business come to the County.
- Comment on Oconee's School System and their achievement to learn in-person during the pandemic. *Chairman Daniell* – Keeping students in school is important for their education. *Commissioner Horton* – Support of the School System through funding and use of facilities at no charge is important. *Commissioner Saxon* – Students being allowed to learn in-person has been a blessing. *Commissioner Harden* – Oconee County is fortunate to have professionals, parent support, teachers, staff and bus drivers are the reason why the School System has done well. If there are disagreements, we will get through it. Our County staff should also be recognized for their efforts during this past year.
- How close are we to a traffic light at Union Church Road and Highway 53? *Chairman Daniell* – An improvement is being considered and a study is in process. During the Board's next work session, we plan to have proposal for a joint project with the Department of Transportation.

*Ian Taylor, DaAndra Drive* – Will the Department of Transportation continue with ownership of the Oconee Connector? *Chairman Daniell* – Portions of the Oconee Connector will be transferred to the County prior to the flyover project.

*Rick Garrett* – Please provide an update on Bishop Farms Parkway project. *Chairman Daniell* – The project is on hold. Funds from the Georgia Department of Transportation and Oconee County funds total \$2.3 million and the lowest bid was over \$3.0 million.

*Victoria Crews (via Zoom)* – A Judicial Watch group shows that Oconee County has a 111% voter registration; is that possible? *Chairman Daniell* – No, it is not possible. That is more of a data issue than a problem in the County. The Board of Elections has a very accurate voter list.

*Pamela Hall* – Regarding a recent rezone decision, how can citizens be assured that the Comprehensive Plan will be followed to protect our properties? Decisions seem to be made in direct conflict with the Plan. *Commissioner Horton* – I do my homework and try to follow the guidelines that are in the Comp Plan. *Chairman Daniell* – Zoning issues are the most challenging decisions as Commissioners while trying to balance property rights of citizens. As we look back over the Board's decisions, the Comp Plan has been followed closely. Ms. Hall commented that the rezone she mentioned was not Oconee Mercantile.

*Victoria Crews, via Zoom* – Clarify the County's stance regarding pandemic restrictions. *Chairman Daniell* – There is no county-wide mask mandate. A judicial order is in place for wearing a face covering inside the courthouse. We encourage citizens to do the right thing and follow the Governor's orders when gathering in groups. Our staff has done a great job of providing virtual meetings via Zoom.

Adam Hammond – Will the size and cost of the Administration Building be affected without the Library? *Chairman Daniell* - A Request for Proposal (RFP) will be posted in the next few weeks for an architectural firm. Without the Library, the building will be smaller and the cost will drop.

Tommy Malcom – Thank you for having a Town Hall Meeting. There are large projects on Highway 316. Are there federal or state funding for the Highway 53 corridor or Highway 441? *Chairman Daniell* – There are no long-term plans for Highway 53 at this time. We are working on two roundabouts on Highway 53 and the intersection at Union Church Road. We are working with the UGA Engineering Department for the corridor from Union Church Road to Publix Shopping Center.

**Adjourn:**

The Town Hall Meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

---

John Daniell, Chairman

---

Kathy Hayes, County Clerk

---

Date