

OCONEE COUNTY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Oconee County Administrative Building
CALLED MEETING
January 13, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Brock Toole, Chairman
John Daniell, Vice Chairman (Chairman, Oconee County Board of Commissioners)
Courtney Bernardi, Secretary (President, Oconee Chamber of Commerce)
Brian Brodrick (Mayor, City of Watkinsville)
Rick Waller

OTHERS PRESENT:

Holly Stephenson, Oconee County Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m., by Chairman Brock Toole.

Approval of Agenda:

On motion by Brian Brodrick and second by Courtney Bernardi, the Agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes:

On motion by John Daniell and second by Brian Brodrick, the Minutes for the Meeting of December 2, 2025 were approved as presented.

Election of Officers:

On motion by Brian Brodrick and second by Rick Waller, the Authority voted unanimously for Brock Toole as Chairman through the year 2026.

On motion by Brock Toole and second by Brian Brodrick, the Authority voted unanimously for John Daniell as Vice Chair through the year 2026.

On motion by Brock Toole and second by Brian Brodrick, the Authority voted unanimously for Courtney Bernardi as Secretary through the year 2026.

Discussion on Dawson Park:

John Daniell reviewed the presentation made at the last meeting by Kemper Sports. He highlighted the costs and proposed revenues for synthetic turf vs. grass fields options. He advised grading would begin in the summer of 2026. After an anticipated 12-18 months of grading, field work could begin. Costs and funding will determine number and type of fields. Gym costs and funding sources would be decided during that time so construction could also begin on the gym if funding is available.

The five-year economic impact was discussed based on construction beginning in 2026. Currently, there are 99 hotel rooms in the county with another 200-250 needed if this facility is used for sports tourism. Courtney Bernardi discussed the current need for more hotels in Athens also. Airbnb, boutique hotels, and other overnight stay opportunities could be possibilities in the area. There is already current zoning approved for several hotels in the county.

Brian Brodrick asked about the current transportation infrastructure in the Dawson Park area. John Daniell responded that there will be a second entrance off Plantation Drive, in addition to a full entrance and a right in, right out on Rocky Branch Road. Rocky Branch Road at Malcom Bridge Road will likely require a roundabout. Traffic engineers have looked at the flows of the area.

Rick Waller asked about available funds for Dawson Park already on hand from SPLOST. He expressed concerns about the community need for a completed park now as opposed to developing the park in stages. With the SPLOST money currently coming in, he would like to see the park completed to include the gymnasium as soon as possible.

John Daniell responded there is money on hand from SPLOST collections, savings from the fiber project, and COVID funds. The county has the money projected to be spent on the fields but not the funds to cover the gymnasium also. Rick Waller asked if additional SPLOST money or bonds could be used to build the gym at the same time as the fields. John Daniell responded much of the proposed 27 SPLOST is designated for parks, but improvements at HCM park are needed as well as maintenance of the current park facilities. Additionally, SPLOST 27 will pay off OVP. He stated there is approximately \$10 million designated for Dawson Park at this time. Funding is always a concern as the total cost would be around \$40 million. He explained that engineering and concept plans for Dawson Park have been discussed for years, and all designs are currently being completed with no time being lost. Grading will be completed for the gymnasium site at the same time as for the fields.

Brian Brodrick asked John Daniell what the county would like from the Industrial Development Authority. John Daniell responded the county is asking \$5 million from the IDA for the synthetic turf fields.

Brian Brodrick started a discussion on county-wide park growth to create everyday opportunities for the citizens. John Daniell stated the county is planning Dawson Park because fields are currently needed, while the county is maintaining the green space at the location. The park will also be built for growth. Additionally, there are improvements being made to Heritage Park. Courtney Bernardi mentioned a holistic approach when it comes to marketing. Brian Brodrick added the importance of a holistic approach to recreation in the entire county and its impact on citizens: quality of life, healthy families, and active adults. He discussed forming a strategic plan for all parks and recreation in the county to include all the cities. He added the importance of private industry investing in this industry.

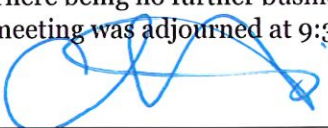
Courtney Bernardi asked John Daniell when the Board of Commissioners would discuss funding the second portion of Dawson Park. John Daniell responded that he expected that decision in the spring of 2026 once the grading plans are at 90%.

John Daniell reminded the members that Dawson Park is needed and will be built with or without sports tourism. Kemper Sports has determined Oconee County is a viable sports tourism site and has provided the economic impact projected for this industry. Utilizing sports tourism is an opportunity to have funds to operate and maintain the park at little to no taxpayer expense. Kemper would be responsible for marketing and scheduling events long before the park opens. The project will bring hotel rooms, expanded business, and additional revenues to the county from the visitors. A \$5 million contribution from the IDA would have strong economic returns for the county. Discussions continued about making an impact county-wide and determining the best economic strategy for the Authority's funds.

The consensus of the Authority was that turf fields over grass fields would be the best solution for Dawson Park. Due to a decision needed by the county soon on synthetic or grass fields, the Authority will meet again on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at 9:30am to decide on the IDA's contribution to Dawson Park.

Adjourn:

There being no further business, on motion by Courtney Bernardi and second by Brian Brodrick, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.



Courtney Bernardi, Secretary
Oconee County Industrial Development Authority

1.27.26
Date

Submitted by: Holly Stephenson, County Clerk