



The City News Express

SPRING

Connecting Austell Government With Its Citizens

2015

State of the City Message from the Mayor

The State of the City of Austell is Very Good! The Council and I have continued our commitment to maintaining a high standard of living for our residents with no tax increases. During the past year we have achieved long-term and short-term goals, and made improvements in the City's infrastructure including the approval of a 7.6 million dollar budget for 2016 which includes raises for employees and other enhancements with no tax increase.

In 2001 we purchased the historic old Coats and Clark Threadmill. The building was renovated and restored to a place of prominence in the community. The Mayor and Council planned for the Threadmill Complex to be self-sustaining and leased space to businesses, professional services, beauty shops, retail shops, two state agencies and a branch of the Cobb County Library System. Austell's Municipal Court, the Mayor's Office and other City offices are also located in the Threadmill Complex.



Joe Jerkins, Mayor

Although it took several years for the project to be completed, the vision of government and private enterprise working side by side in the Threadmill has become a reality. In fact this long term goal has now been accomplished...the Threadmill has reached 100% occupancy!

The torrential rains throughout the day on September 21, 2009 caused the worst flood in Austell's history. The high waters eventually receded, and left large areas of the city devastated in it's wake. Debris was everywhere, and many houses were uninhabitable. We have been working with FEMA and GEMA for the past six years to acquire these properties and demolish them. To date, sixty-four properties have been acquired and there are currently twelve potential properties to be acquired before the current project expires on 12/31/2015. At the last Council Meeting, we approved the condemnation of four more houses that will be torn down. Throughout the city, neighborhood parks and green spaces have been created by the demolition of the blighted houses. The total cost for the project through May 31, 2015 is \$7,316,565, shared by FEMA, GEMA and the City of Austell. Our share is \$158,429 which represents approximately 2.17% of the Total Project Cost.

We hope there will be no more floods in Austell, but since Austell is situated where five creeks converge, it is more than likely that we will experience another flood sometime in the future. Sweetwater Creek is the largest of these bodies of water, but Olive Creek, Powder Creek, Noses Creek and Buttermilk Creek contributed to the deluge that crippled the City for several days. In the 2009 flood, as in other floods through the years, we had to use boats to rescue some of our residents and animals that were stranded. The City owned one small boat, but residents and Douglas County gave us a helping hand by providing several boats to assist in our rescue efforts. Because of that experience, we are taking measures to be better prepared, The City is purchasing an additional boat, a large flat boat especially designed for use in floods.

SPLOST, **S**pecial **L**ocal **O**ption **S**ales **T**ax, is an optional one percent county sales tax used to fund capital outlay projects in Cobb County and its municipalities. The most recent SPLOST (2016) was approved by Cobb voters in November, 2014. Austell has shared in SPLOST funds through the years and has been able to make improvements throughout the City that would not otherwise have been possible. During the past year, we utilized SPLOST funds to resurface Austell-Powder Springs Road; Brown Street.; Greystone Court and Greystone Place; Northview Drive. and Walker Street. We have re-striped Austell-Powder Springs Road; Humphries Hill Road; Joe Jerkins Boulevard. and Mulberry Street. The Public Works storage building was a Capital Improvement project this year, and miscellaneous projects included drainage improvements on Brown Street.; curb repair; Jefferson Street. drainage improvements; pothole repair; speed bump installation and sidewalk repair. Our Public Works Department has had a busy year!

The Public Works staff explored the possibility of privatizing our solid waste services, and recommended a change. They believed the change would be cost effective for the City and also save money for the citizens. Republic Services of Georgia has provided good service at a very competitive rate and helped streamline services to the residents.

Council Members

Ward 1 - Kirsten Anderson
Ward 2 - Scott Thomas

Ward 3 - Randy Green
Ward 4 - Virginia Reagan

At Large Post 1 - Ollie Clemons
At Large Post 2 - Suzanne Thomason



Chief Tim Williams

On June 24th, after thirty-four years of service, our Fire Chief Tim Williams will retire from the City of Austell. He was hired as a Firefighter in 1981 and promoted to Fire Chief in 1994. At that time the Department was small and not well trained, but Tim Williams worked hard and his leadership made a difference in the level of training and professional attitude of his Firefighters and EMTs. He supports their physical training; stays informed about technical advances and makes sure all equipment is up to date and properly maintained.

The Austell Fire Department has one of the best response times in the state, and because of Chief Williams' dedication and attention to detail, our ISO rating has been lowered to four. He has worked closely with the Insurance Service Organization to insure we maintain compliance. Since this rating directly relates to the cost of homeowners' insurance, his efforts have made a difference to the residents of Austell. **Four** is an excellent rate! Through the years, our Chief has secured grants to purchase equipment that has greatly benefitted the city.

Tim Williams is well respected by other Chiefs and Emergency personnel in our area, and he will most certainly be missed for his professional attitude and the leadership he has provided to the Austell Fire Department and to the city as a whole. As he leaves, our best wishes go with him.

We are pleased to announce that Deputy Fire Chief Pat Maxwell will assume the duties of Fire Chief and Captain Brandon Merritt, Firefighter/EMT, will take over as Deputy Fire Chief. We know our Fire Department will continue its high standard of excellence with Pat and Brandon in key leadership positions.

Our First Annual Run-Walk with the Mayor was a tremendous success! More than one hundred thirty participants signed up for the 5K race on Saturday, April 18th. Youngsters, from age 12 to seniors 50+ participated in the event. Beginning at Legion Park, the semi-flat USTAF certified 5K course passed some familiar Austell landmarks. A segment of the course took runners by scenic Sweetwater Creek and a portion of a wooded trail that passed through the City of Austell Community Garden. Medals were awarded to the overall top three male and female participants in each age group. A portion of the proceeds of the event benefitted the Sweetwater Mission Food Bank, and participants brought canned goods to help the food bank. The runners/walker enjoyed the morning run through Austell and plans are already in progress for the next race.

Health insurance rates have been rising for the past decade and will continue to do so. For several years, the Mayor and Council have been looking at ways to lower these costs to the city. They set up a health committee to promote health awareness among our employees, and Austell was selected by the Georgia Municipal Association to receive an Employee Health Promotion and Wellness Incentive Grant. The purpose of the grant was to promote work site programs reinforcing the health and wellness of city employees. After considering effective ways to communicate with the employees, the Council voted to build an employee gym in an old building on the Threadmill property. The gym, as well as support for weight reduction programs, has been well received by our employees. The gym is open to all employees seven days a week and has been used by many employees on a regular basis. We have great expectations that this facility will be a positive influence on our employees, helping them focus on wellness.

Family Fun Day was held at Collar Park on Saturday, May 30th. The response from the community was overwhelming! Parents and children came to enjoy the day. Family fun Day was Council Member Virginia Reagan's idea. She has been concerned that in many parts of the country relations are strained between police departments and their communities. While that is not the case in Austell, she said a family day with a focus on interaction with our Police Officers and providing free child ID Kits would be a wonderful opportunity to get to know each other and build relationships. It was a great day with entertainment for the children, food and musical entertainment. Free pony rides, bounce house, train rides and games brought smiles to faces young and old. More than eight hundred people came to enjoy the sunshine and have fun with their family and friends. Family Fun Day 2015 was such a success, plans are already underway for another day next year! We hope to see you and your family there.

The Austell Museum, located on the first floor of the Threadmill Complex has been open for about a year and a half, and visitors continue to come and enjoy our treasures from the past. Groups of school children visit and marvel at the day-to-day lives of residents of Austell more than one hundred years ago. Seniors come and remember when sewing machines really looked like that and Austell residents come and share fond memories of people and places of their youth. The Museum has acquired more historical treasures for your viewing pleasure. If you haven't stopped by recently, plan to visit soon. The Museum is open 8:30 am to 4:30 am Monday through Friday

Your Public Servant,

Joe Jerkins