



City Manager's Annual Report for 2023

We began 2023 with the news that despite the agreement that we signed to pay for the upgraded rail crossing on Main Street, Norfolk Southern was not going to move forward with the project. The reason given was that their engineers would not approve the project. Instead, they decided that they would replace the existing asphalt crossing.

January also saw the completion of the long overdue upgrades to the Skate Park. The new ramps were funded with surplus SPLOST V funds.

We celebrated Arbor Day on February 17th by planting 3 pink Dogwood Trees at the Chenocetah Water Tank. We also received the Tree City designation for the 32nd year in a row!

Also, in February GMA designated Cornelia as a Certified City of Civility becoming one of the first cities in Georgia to achieve this designation.

February also saw the issuance of the Land Disturbance permits for the much-anticipated Fairfield Inn. The project is progressing nicely and should be completed by early summer 2024.

In March we began working on the Highway 365 Welcome Signs. Our Public Works Department completed all the work on these signs, saving the city thousands of dollars. The finished signs look great and have proven to be a very nice addition to the city.

In April we installed a fence around the Splash pad in order to improve the safety for those using the facility.

Garrett Paving began the Market Corners Drive Project in April. Under the terms of the agreement with Marriott we obtained ownership of the road in order to make repairs to it. The existing road was in such bad shape we had to completely rebuild it. The project, which included drainage improvements and the installation of a sidewalk, should be completed in early 2024.

We held the first public meeting on the Comprehensive Plan on April 13th with 9 citizens in attendance. We also launched the online survey for the Comprehensive Plan in April.

In May we discovered a sinkhole on Main Street between Appletree Alley and Hodges Street. Upon investigation we discovered that there were several old storm pipes that were no longer functional causing the base to wash out from under the pavement. City workers were able to complete the repairs at a cost of \$61,000 which is 1/3 of what a contractor would have charged.

Also, in May we received a letter from a lady named Cornelia Kocher from Switzerland. Mrs. Kocher was travelling from Atlanta to Gatlinburg and decided to stop off in the town that shares her name. She reported that she toured the Depot Museum and ate lunch at Fender's Diner and was very pleased with her experience!

In June we had an artist named Annabelle Jackson re-create the approved designs from our Fire Hydrant decorating contest. We selected 3 designs from more than 600 entries from students at North Hab Middle School and Level Grove Elementary. Ms. Jackson did an excellent job painting these designs on fire hydrants located on the corner of Front Street and Main Street, Irvin Street and Main Street, and Clarkesville Street across from the Depot. We plan to make this an annual event.

We held the second public meeting on the Comprehensive Plan in June. We had 8 citizens show up to voice their concerns and opinions regarding the future of Cornelia.

Garrett Paving completed our annual paving project in July. Using a combination of LMIG and SPLOST funds we were able to re-surface Banks Street, Dolson Street, and Sunrise Circle.

August saw the dedication of the Storybook Trail at City Park. This was a partnership with Pebble Ministries to create a way for children to improve their reading skills and get some physical activity. As you heard at the December Commission Meeting the response has been phenomenal!

Also, in August we received notice that our CDBG application had been approved. This grant will provide \$1 million towards the cost of replacing the existing water and sewer infrastructure in Alpine Trailer Park.

With the assistance of Congressman Clyde's Office, the mayor and I met with Norfolk Southern about the Hoyt Street Bridge and Downtown Crossing. During the meeting we went over a list of wishes that we want from the railroad in order for us to grant permission to remove the bridge. The meeting went well, and we have already begun the permitting process to increase the size of the drainage pipe that goes through the railbed at Irvin Street. The bridge has been removed and the downtown rail crossing project is scheduled to be completed in early 2024. GDOT will be making the improvements to the Rosa Parks crossing sometime this year as well.

In September we once again held a very successful Big Red Apple Festival! The weather was perfect, and thousands of people flocked to downtown for the event.

Also, in September we received notice that Cornelia was 1 of 5 communities selected to participate in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) Program. This is a 3-year program that will provide us with much needed insight and resources to help with our neighborhood revitalization efforts.

In October we received notice that our application for a Vibrant Communities Grant was approved. This grant will provide funding to assist with the cost of the Tim Loves Tink Community Mural project.

Also, in October our application for Plan First was approved. This designation is a result of the city's efforts to complete the projects identified in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The designation gives us a 1% interest rate reduction on GEFA loans, and the ability to apply for CDBG funding every year instead of every other year.

In November the referendum granting us permission to enact our Redevelopment Powers passed. This enables us to request permission to create a Tax Allocation District in the future if we have a proposed project that would benefit from a TAD.

Unfortunately, November saw the first tax increase for the City of Cornelia in over 20 years. The increase was prompted by the large residential growth we have experienced in recent years. Residential properties do not generate the tax base needed to provide them with city services. By adding over 300 residential units since 2019 it has put a strain on our Public Safety Departments to the point where we have to add more Police Officers.

November also saw the inaugural Dashing Through the Lights 5k which was held on the day after Thanksgiving. Over 120 runners participated in the event which began at the Depot and went through the light display at City Park before finishing back at the Depot.

Despite the weather our annual Christmas in Cornelia event went well. The rain broke just long enough for the event. Unfortunately, we did have several vendors not show up and we were unable to do the hayrides but overall, the crowd was pretty good. The Cornelia Tourism Board raised just over \$1,800 with their inaugural Christmas Tree Auction. The proceeds from the auction will go towards the DDA's Façade Grant Program.

Also, in December we received notice from the Department of Community Affairs that our Comprehensive Plan was approved.

Projects to look forward to for this year include the completion of the improvements to the old reservoir which was originally funded in 2012. The much-needed expansion to the Wastewater Plant should go out for bid in March. This will expand our capacity from 3 mgd to 4.5 mgd. The Fairfield Inn is scheduled to be completed this summer. We have some other projects in the planning phase that will continue to make Cornelia the economic engine of Habersham County. These projects along with the dedication of our city employees give me the confidence to say that 2024 will once again be another successful year for the City of Cornelia.

Donald Anderson
City Manager