



## **City Manager's Monthly Annual Report for 2020**

This year started out with a lot of excitement and promise. Of course, this quickly changed because of the onset of Covid 19. Covid completely changed the way in which we conduct our daily business. Despite this pandemic making 2020 one of the most depressing and forgettable years in history, the city was still able to accomplish a lot of good things which makes this year another success!

In January we welcomed our new Mayor, John Borrow, and he hit the ground running. His involvement with the Downtown Development Authority has been a large part of the transformation that we have experienced in our downtown this year. On January 22nd the DDA was finally able to sell the Old Cornelia Bank Building. The new owner has already begun construction on transforming the building into a much-needed restaurant. Once complete the city will have another nice attraction to help bring visitors to downtown.

In February we began meeting with representatives from the county and other cities about SPLOST. Following this first meeting none of us could have predicted what was coming. Over the next few months Mayor Borrow really earned his monthly stipend from the city. After reaching a verbal agreement with the Mayors and County Commission Chair which would have given us \$6 million in SPLOST revenue the deal fell apart. One of our neighboring cities did not like the formula that was agreed upon. This prompted a few of the county commissioners to reject this formula as well. The population formula that they wanted to use would have dropped our revenue from \$6 million to \$4 million. As a result, the Mayor and I attended multiple City Council and County Commission meetings trying to gain support. Finally, our efforts paid off when the Mayor was able to broker a deal which brought our portion of the revenue up to \$5.3 million.

In March the world changed as we began to learn more about the Coronavirus. We made several operational changes to protect our employees. City buildings were closed to the public. We began making the public use the payment box for all Utility Bill payments in order to limit our exposure to the public. Our Municipal Court was cancelled for several months. We began holding our City Commission Meetings virtually which worked pretty well.

Also, in March we finally received permission from the EPD to begin filling our new reservoir. This was not an easy task because we were not allowed to exceed our 4 MGD withdrawal so It took some time.

In April we had our first employees affected by the virus when 2 Police Officers tested positive. To date we have had more than 10 employees test positive for the virus. Luckily all these employees have made a full recovery.

In May we learned that for the first time in 10 years we did not have a CDBG application turned into DCA for consideration. Because of the Coronavirus DCA announced in March that they would only accept applications from Courier Services. Our Grant Writer made arrangements for Fed Ex to meet her at the DCA offices to take the package and deliver it. They did not show up, so she

brought the application back to her office and It was delivered several days after the deadline. The city was made aware of this until after the DCA Commissioner had already made a ruling that our application would not be accepted. In conversations with DCA they stated that had she tried to submit the application in person they would have accepted. Also, had we contacted them before the Commissioner made his ruling, they would have accepted the application. As a result of this error and the fact that we were not made aware for several weeks I have terminated our agreement with our previous grant writer.

At the May Commission Meeting we entered into an agreement with Don Cantrell to purchase the Parking Lot behind the Old Post Office. This Parking Lot has been incorporated into the Appletree Alley Streetscape Project. It will add some much-needed public parking in Downtown.

In June the county announced that they would have to temporarily close the Cornelia Recycling Center because of the Coronavirus. The issue was that because the prison had been on lock down, they fell behind bundling cardboard. All their employees were having to spend all their time at the landfill bundling cardboard. In order to keep this service available to our citizens we began sending an employee to help bundle cardboard one day a week. We also paid one of our employees to open the recycling center on Saturdays so that our citizens would still be able to take advantage of this service. We continued this until the county was finally able to take over operations in December.

In July City Hall and the Police Department moved into the new Municipal Building. We held our first City Commission Meeting In the new Courtroom on August 11th.

In August the Downtown Development Authority entered into a Lease Purchase Agreement with Jay Reeder for the Parking Lot between Fender's and Arnold Drug. The purpose of this was to allow the Parking Lot to be transformed into an outdoor entertainment venue with a much-needed greenspace component. While the project is still under construction Fender's Alley played a large in our Downtown Christmas event. The Premier Dancers performed on the stage followed by live music. I predict that this decision will prove to be the catalyst that transforms our downtown back into a place that people will want to visit.

In September we were awarded to Grants for the Fire Department totaling \$381,466. The first was a grant in the amount of \$333,333 to help with the purchase of a new Fire Truck. The second was in the amount of \$48,133 to help with the purchase of equipment needed by the Fire Department.

In October we had a rare weather event that caused significant damage to several areas of the city. We had 9.6 inches of rain during a 24-hour period, according to our engineers this is considered a 200-year flood. This Is so uncommon that when engineers design drainage structures they design for a 100-year flood. Most of the damage was able to be repaired by city crews but Irvin Street and Front Street had to be repaired by a contractor. The repairs totaled \$305,000 which was paid for with the money collected through our Stormwater Fees.

At the October Commission Meeting we awarded a contract to Higgins Construction for the long awaited Appletree Alley Streetscape Project. This project has been discussed since 2013 but only gained traction in 2019 when the city was awarded a USDA Grant in the amount of \$99,999 to help with the project. This project will be another major contributor to the transformation of our Downtown, construction should begin this month. The project is funded in part with grants from USDA and Georgia Power totaling \$109,999, the proceeds from the sale of the Bank Building, \$160,900 and city funds.

We also began filtering water through our new Water Treatment Plant in October. We had to run the new plant in conjunction with the old plant for 30 days. Once EPD reviewed the data and concurred that the Plant was working properly we received our permit to operate the new plant. We began treating all of the drinking water for the city out of the new plant on November 30th. This is the culmination of 10 years of planning, engineering, and construction!

The DCA Commissioner came to Cornelia in November to present the Mayor with our Plan First designation. This is a program that recognizes cities that actually do the things they say they are going to do. What I mean is when we put a project in our Comprehensive Plan, we actually complete the project. Because we have been able to complete most of the items that we listed in our 2008 Comprehensive Plan the state has recognized us with their Plan First designation. There are several benefits to receiving this designation, lower interest rates on GEFA loans, the ability to apply for CDBG grants every year, and bonus points on grant applications to name a few.

In December we were notified by Moody's Investor's Service that the city's bond rating had increased from BAA2 to A3. This will enable us to receive better interest rates on any future bonds or loans that we apply for. This is a testament to the city's strong financial situation and our budgeting practices.

2021 will be a welcomed with hope! We have a lot planned to continue to make Cornelia a place to visit, live, and thrive!

Donald Anderson  
City Manager