



2022 OPERATING BUDGET 2022 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET

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City Manager

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BACKGROUND AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Official Code of Ordinances of the City of Sugar Hill directs the City Manager to annually submit to the Mayor and City Council a proposed operating budget as well as a proposed capital improvement budget, including recommendations as to the means of financing the proposed capital improvements.

In accordance with **State law and the City of Sugar Hill's Official Code of Ordinances**, I hereby submit the proposed **2022 Operating and Capital Improvement Budgets** for your consideration. These same documents were filed with the office of City Clerk and published online via the city's web site on Monday, November 22, 2021, and are available for public inspection in person or via the city's web site.

The required public notification appeared in the Gwinnett Daily Post on **Wednesday, November 24, 2021**, and appeared again on **Wednesday, December 1, 2021**. The required ad notified the public of the submission of the budget documents, their availability for public inspection and the dates of the public hearings. The first public hearing was held on Monday, **December 6th** at the December City Council work session and the second required hearing is tonight, at the December City Council meeting, where the budget will be **considered** for **adoption** by the Mayor and City Council.

A Year of Recovery and Growth

This past year has been markedly different than what we collectively experienced in 2020 with COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. We have seen a reopening of the economy, concerts and events returning and people eager to engage with families, friends, neighbors, and visitors.

Recreation and Outdoors:

After the severe weather events of 2020 that impacted the turf fields at Gary Pirkle Park, the signature turf fields, including the subsurface, were replaced and put back into operation. The natural grass playing fields were also expanded after years of working with the Corps of Engineers for approval and replaced with our signature turf playing surface.

The performance of the Sugar Hill Golf Club continued a positive trend in 2021. We saw record play again this year with relatively warmer weather and good playing conditions. We made significant investments in the golf course irrigation, bunker restoration, fairway and green complexes and other improvements designed to improve the playing experience.

We also made significant strides with the construction of the Sugar Hill Greenway and several parks/trailheads.

Arts and Entertainment:

Our entertainment venues, like all other entertainment venues around the country, went dark in 2020, except for a few private rentals of the Eagle and Bowl. The 2021 season has been completely different for the Bowl, Eagle Theatre, the E Center Promenade, and the Dawn P. Gober Community Plaza. It has been a busy and exciting year.

The Bowl hosted several well-attended concerts ranging from artists like David Martinez, The Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Tank and the Bangas to the legendary members of the Roots and Boots Tour (Aaron Tippin, Sammy Kershaw, and Collin Raye), Pat Benatar and 38 Special.

The **Eagle Theatre** has also been a busy venue, hosting city-sponsored and private events. City-sponsored events include concerts by the Swingin' Medallions, The Outlaws and Christmas with John Berry: The Silver Anniversary Tour. Sugar Hill's own Players Guild resumed production in 2021 with its most successful play yet, "The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge" which drew near sellouts for almost every show.

The **Sugar Rush Arts Festival** was once again back in person and the two-day event was well attended and enjoyed by thousands. The **2021 Holiday Festival** was also a successful event with activities for people of all ages.

Development:

Despite the lingering effects of pandemic-related issues such as vaccines and supply chain disruptions, 2021 was still another remarkable year for our growing downtown. The **Broadstone by Alliance** was 100% leased less than a year after construction completion and was sold and changed names to “The Local.” Occupancy remains close to the 100% mark.

The **Cadence by Prestwick** at the northwestern corner of Hillcrest and Highway 20 welcomed its first tenants in August and quickly leased up three buildings nearest Hillcrest that were approved for occupancy. We expect the other three buildings to lease up quickly as well as they become available in spring and summer 2022.

Directly across Highway 20 from the Cadence is the new **Holbrook Senior Living by Solomon**, a luxury senior living facility that includes 130 units of assisted living and memory care. The Holbrook is pre-leasing now and is expected to welcome their first residents in late spring or early summer 2022.

Two other developments in downtown were approved in 2021 by the city council on real estate owned by the city. Solis Sugar Hill by Terwilliger Pappas and City View by Kittle Homes.

Solis Sugar Hill by Terwilliger Pappas closed in mid-November and site work is underway on the 4.5-acre site directly west of city hall. Terwilliger Pappas will construct a 650-space parking deck (with 250 public spaces to be owned by the downtown development authority) and be wrapped by 290 new luxury rental units and 11,000sf of commercial space on Temple Avenue that will also be owned and managed by the downtown development authority.

City View by Kittle Homes closed on November 30, 2021, and site work should begin by the end of the year. The 2.67-acre site is on the west side of Hillcrest and borders West Broad, Hillcrest and Highway 20. Kittle Homes will construct twenty-six 4-story high-end **fee-simple** brownstones, each with a rooftop experience and be served by an elevator in each unit. The site will also include a free-standing, 2,000sf commercial space at the corner of Highway 20 and Hillcrest.

These **five private sector** developments are investing over **\$275 million** in our downtown.

City council also approved **four other developments** in 2021 that will bring another **\$200 million** of private sector investment to our downtown.

Rangewater received approval to build a mixed-use facility that will include 125 for-rent brownstones, 4,000sf of commercial space, and a public pocket park on a site that currently houses the old Bailey Cabinet Company.

Prestwick was so pleased with the Sugar Hill market that it assembled another site that is sandwiched between Hillcrest and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (the former Honda Parts

Connection salvage yard) and received approval to build a destination development that will include approximately 300 luxury apartments, row houses, and townhomes as well 2,000sf of commercial space, food truck parking areas, all connected by the Sugar Hill Greenway that will be constructed by the developer through the site and connect onto Hillcrest.

Fuqua Development and Novare received approval to construct 269 luxury apartments, 20 townhomes and 40,000sf of office, restaurant, and retail space on the northside of Highway 20 and Stanley Street. Sugar Hill Church was one of the property owners for the project and is excited about this new development beside and connected to its campus. This development also abuts the new Prestwick development, and the developer will also construct the Sugar Hill Greenway through their site to connect to the Prestwick greenway segment. The developer will also provide a landing spot on their site for the planned Highway 20 pedestrian bridge that will connect downtown with the northern portion of the city and these new developments.

We also saw the approval of a 40,000sf **Northside Hospital** medical office complex at the northeast corner of Sycamore and Highway 20 that will eventually house specialists and related services of Northside Hospital.

In addition to our market, each of these developers/investors would tell you that they were willing to put that much money on the line to be in Sugar Hill for three main reasons:

1. the city's well thought-out downtown and city-wide master plans.
2. A mayor, city council and staff committed to the vision articulated in the plans.
3. The willingness to invest in our own vision (E Center, Eagle Theatre, Bowl & Greenway).

Community Assets and Operations

The **Dawn P. Gober Community Plaza** was transformed again in October for the start of the 2021/2022 version of the Ice Rink at Sugar Hill. Its first few weeks of operation has seen record attendance for what many describe as the best ice-skating experience in the south.

2017 SPLOST proceeds **continue to exceed** the county's conservative estimates, which will help with the full implementation of our proposed **2022 Capital Improvement Program** project list. This is especially good news for the construction schedule of the popular and evolving Sugar Hill Greenway, our new parks and trailheads, E Center improvements, road improvements, and sidewalk construction.

The **city's municipal gas system** maintains its position as the second lowest 12-month average cost to the consumer of any municipal system or private marketer in the state, according to the Georgia Public Service Commission. In fact, Sugar Hill natural gas customers pay approximately **50% to 150% less than any private gas marketer in the state**. Sugar Hill natural gas is a cost effective and highly competitive energy source, and we are proud of our safety and customer service record. We were able to hit the **55% mark** in our growing system of new electronic meter-reading AMR installations, continuing the program to transition to a new electronic meter-reading system ((AMR) over a five-year period.

For the 12 months ending 10/31/21, the gas department handled 5,938 locates (a 17% decrease over 2020), installed 144 new meters, investigated 190 leak inquiries, and responded to an additional 675 other system work orders. Our meter count has increased to 11,662 active meters, another sign of growth in the Sugar Hill gas market area.

In 2021, the city's annual road resurfacing program saw **nearly 7 miles of city streets repaired or resurfaced** as well as completion of several sidewalk repair projects.

The city's street department has been recognized by the Georgia Department of Transportation and Gwinnett County for their attention to detail and daily efforts to maintain the city's **82 acres of right-of-way** as well as providing **maintenance on 73 miles of city streets**. The department has three crews responsible for the collection and disposal of bagged grass clippings, leaves, and yard debris from residents.

In 2021, this represented 1,332 truckloads processed. In addition, the department's chipping efforts of tree limbs and branches resulted in 197 loads as well as hauling off yard debris to our disposal facility. Staff is also responsible for maintenance and monitoring of the city's closed landfill along with all record-keeping and compliance reporting.

The **Street Department** provides maintenance and fleet management for its 46 vehicles as well as large trucks and heavy equipment. This team serves as first responders and provides support to important infrastructure repairs during and after all storms. The team also assists other city departments with construction and maintenance projects, (including helping with maintenance at the golf course since prison crews are no longer available), property acquisition and assimilation, demolition work, fencing, and cleanup, saving taxpayers a significant amount of money by using in-house resources.

Finances:

Later this week, the city and the Sugar Hill Downtown Development Authority **will close on \$7.6 million of economic development bonds** (to be privately placed with J. P. Morgan Chase) at a rate of 2.01% for 12 years with a no-cost 5-year callable provision. These funds will be used to reimburse the city for the advanced purchase of 250-parking spaces and 11,000sf of commercial space in the Solis development as well as provide resources for tenant improvements once the DDA takes possession of the commercial assets and executes leases.

The **FY2020 Audit** was completed by the city's auditor in June. In mid-July, the city received notification from the State Department of Audits that the FY2020 Audit had been accepted and approved. For the eighth year in a row, the city received an "unqualified audit report", **which means the audit report issued by the city's independent audit firm is issued without qualification and is free of any encumbrances or conditional statements**. The audit also showed a strong fiscal position with additions to the city's fund balance and unrestricted reserves.

We are proud of our finance staff and the entire management team that work hard throughout the year to follow established procedures and maintain integrity and transparency in everything

we do. We take our responsibilities seriously in managing the resources provided to us by the mayor and council and Sugar Hill taxpayers.

The city's tax digest continued to grow, reflecting confidence in the Sugar Hill market. New large-scale private sector commercial developments and increased property values have seen the **FY2021 net digest increase to \$1.140 billion**. The city's digest is still below the digests of our neighbors – Buford, Suwanee, and Duluth – but we are growing at a healthy rate and our **residential to commercial ratio continues to make small gains** away from a community reliant solely on residential property taxes.

Another positive metric is the city's population growth. The 2020 Census showed the city growing to 25,132 people, a 36% increase since 2010. This puts Sugar Hill in the top 70 of the 540 cities in the state. The only cities **larger than Sugar Hill** in Gwinnett County are Peachtree Corners, Lawrenceville, and Duluth.

Fiscally, the city remains in excellent financial shape, both in liquid (cash on hand assets) as well as substantial real estate holdings to accommodate planned development/redevelopment opportunities, parks, and greenspace.

The **city's financial policy** is to maintain at least **20% of the annual budget** in reserve with a recommended level of **30% for "unbudgeted reserves" for emergencies, Capital Improvement Budget (CIP) and any undefined projects**.

The **approved 2021 General Fund budget was \$14,453,778**. Thirty percent (30%) of this calculates to **\$4,336,133**. As of the writing of this report, the **"Unreserved General Fund Balance" exceeds this amount**. We anticipate ending FY2021 with over **\$34 million of cash on hand**, which includes 2017 SPLOST and ARPA funds on hand earmarked for capital improvements. The city also continues to maintain a Gas Utility Fund reserve, currently at \$518,481.

The city's cash position remains strong while continuing to invest in strategic real estate acquisitions over the past five years. While we **have used cash reserves** to strategically purchase properties downtown and other locations in the city, we are **now selling** some of those real estate investments and **reinvesting** the proceeds back into cash reserves or capital projects important to the city's continued growth and quality of life. The mayor and city council have been able to make these investments while keeping **service levels high** and the **millage rate the same for 18 straight years**.

The city is blessed with an intelligent, hard-working, and vision-focused mayor and council as well as dedicated members of the city's various boards and commissions, including the youth council and youth ambassadors. I am proud of our professional and customer-oriented city staff and the hundreds of community volunteers who invest personally of their time, talents and in many cases "sweat labor" to make this city better.

Summary:

2021 has been a year of **hope** and **recovery**. In many cases we have returned to the new “normal” where vaccines, masks and personal hand sanitizing hygiene are extremely important to community health. While we worked together to get through the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still here with the Delta and Omicron variants. We will be watching and listening to the experts to help navigate us through 2022 with primary goal of providing uninterrupted services to our residents/customers in a safe and responsible way.

As staff, we **remain bullish on Sugar Hill** and look forward to another successful year of downtown placemaking and connecting every sector of our community - from the Chattahoochee River on the west and to Lake Lanier on the north to Buford Highway on the east and Tench Road on the south to our downtown through the continued construction of the Sugar Hill Greenway.

2022 Budget Highlights

Before going into the details of the 2022 Budget, I would like for our **Finance Director - Cindy Pugh** – to **come forward** and provide us a high-level overview of our General Fund revenues; revenues that are classified by the state as “taxes,” and how all our revenues are allocated to our various funds and departments. Note that governmental accounting is different than business accounting. We deal with “fund” accounting, and you (as city council) approve the budget at the department level.

The 2022 General Fund Operating Budget reflects an **6.1% increase** over FY2021. The most significant factors influencing the budget change are:

1. **Enhanced public safety** for downtown, neighborhoods, parks, and greenway.
2. Enhanced **facilities** and grounds **maintenance**.
3. Enhanced **public works**, particularly in our street department.
4. Enhanced **staffing** and **maintenance** in our recreation department.

One item that has changed since the presentation of the budget at the first public hearing last Monday is a **\$10,000** increase in the Youth Council line item. This is to fund two trips for the 8-member council and chaperones planned in 2022. First, is the Youth Council’s participation in the **GMA Cities United Summit** in January. The second is the Youth Council’s participation in the **National League of Cities 2022 Congressional Cities Conference** in Washington, DC in March. We have made the adjustment in the budget to increase this appropriation and have **increased anticipated revenues from insurance premium taxes** to off-set this increase.

We continue to make investments in **the professional growth** of our staff through ongoing professional development, continuing education, safety training, employee benefits including health, dental, disability and retirement and competitive compensation. The budget reflects

our **commitment to service delivery** in all facets of city government, continued investments in **our award-winning downtown, parks, and greenspace**, staying true to our **destination city vision** without ever losing sight of our fiduciary responsibility to **protect the city's fiscal stability**.

The budget and city operations have remained organizationally stable as we have evolved as a staff, except for the **enhancement of the city's public safety efforts** to include a new Department of Public Safety.

We continue to experience similar pressures other local governments feel as well as many private sector firms – the effects of **"Baby Boomer"** retirements, skill set losses, a highly competitive labor market (especially in the fields of public works) and rapidly changing technology.

We have made concerted efforts in this budget to use American Rescue Plan funds to provide **"premium pay"** to our workforce most exposed during the pandemic and to enhance the hourly compensation of our entry level and public works employees over the next three fiscal years.

However, the 2022 Operations Budget **includes just "1.5 net" new full-time equivalents (FTEs)** to deliver our wide range of services. The additions including the following:

1. One (1) new full-time **deputy position** in the Public Safety Department.
2. One (1) new full-time **maintenance position** in the Recreation Department.
3. One (1) new **part-time position** and **increased hours** for **five** part-time positions in the Recreation Department, increasing weekly coverage from **80** hours to **150** hours a week.
4. One (1) new full-time **custodian position** in the Facilities Department.

"Other Funds" include the 2022 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget, explained in more detail below, the city's three (3) enterprise funds (Stormwater, Gas and Golf) as well as the E Center, municipal court, and downtown development authority (DDA) operations, E Center management, DDA debt service, and E Center mixed use management.

Overall, "Other Funds" have **increased 16.42%** over the current year, which is mainly attributable to the **addition of American Rescue Plan Act** funds from the U.S. Department of Treasury and an **\$800,000** transfer from the **General Fund** to the 2022 Capital Improvement Plan budget.

The **2022 Capital Improvement Program (CIP)** budget is a **\$785,000 increase** over current year and reflects a continued robust commitment to a wide range of investments important to the city. **Assistant City Manager Troy Besseche** is responsible for the development and management of the Capital Improvement Budget and will provide details of the budget in a few minutes.

Overall, the combined **2022 budgets for Operating Expenses, Capital Improvement Program and Other Funds** reflect a **13.07% total increase** over 2022. Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act and enhanced SPLOST 17 revenues comprise this 2022 increase. **The city remains in a strong financial position with reasonable unrestricted reserves.**

As management staff, we are committed to efficiently and effectively delivering the services authorized by the mayor and council. We continue to be committed to providing world-class customer service, low-cost and safe natural gas, nurturing, celebrating, and rewarding staff growth, increasing public greenspace, connecting our community through enhanced alternative transportation options, delivering first class music, arts, and community events, keeping our public buildings and public spaces clean and safe and embracing strategic public-private partnerships.

General Fiscal Policies and Management

The city continues to maintain reasonable and effective financial management practices. The city responsibly allocates financial resources and carefully monitors expenses to put the city in the best possible position for development opportunities. Our finance staff is well trained and committed to life-long learning. Our finance director has completed all course work for Level II Certification from the Georgia Government Finance Officers Association (GGFOA). The city's two finance specialists have completed Level 1 Certification and participate in many training sessions offered by state-level organizations such as the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Georgia Government Finance Officers Association, the Georgia Municipal Association, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and the Georgia Department of Audits.

Operationally, staff has been trained, equipped, and empowered to manage department budgets and to take actions to properly guard the public trust. Regular budget reports are circulated to staff for review, proper documentation is being secured with requisitions, purchasing is being supervised centrally, and bills are being paid on time. Strict adherence to standard operating procedures is the expected level of compliance.

As mentioned earlier, **the City Manager** is implementing the historical financial reserve, debt, capital improvement, and investment policies currently in place. The city maintains operating budget unrestricted reserves above the policy-established minimum, to account for undefined projects and for unforeseen emergencies. This cash reserve position puts the city in a strong and resilient position with the flexibility and nimbleness to respond to changes in the economy and to seize opportunities to improve when presented. We expect continued increases in fund balance in 2021 and 2022 because of conservative revenue estimates, attention to detail on expenditure management and planned real estate transactions.

As Troy presented earlier, a five-year capital improvement program (CIP) has been developed, totaling over \$51.3 million of investment over the five-year period. The 2022 CIP budget is approximately \$13.8 million, with the majority of that assigned to the Sugar Hill Greenway, new

parks, sidewalk improvements, Bowl stormwater improvements, and the Level Creek/Alton Tucker extension.

The CIP is expected to be fully funded within that five-year period with SPLOST proceeds, ARPA funds, grants, and general fund transfers, helping maintain a “pay-as-you-go” practice within the proposed program. Any large new capital improvement would require council action to finance it through any type of debt instrument. For the sixth year in a row, the current year capital improvement program (CIP) and the remaining four-years of the CIP is presented as a separate fund in the budget.

We are extremely proud of the city’s staff and the many community volunteers that helped achieve our 2021 goals.

We are sad to see **Mayor Edwards** leave us after eight (8) years as mayor. His legacy is clear – just look around. Not just the new parks, greenway or the roads and ROWs that are maintained daily; or the new public improvements like the Bowl, E Center or Eagle Theatre; I submit it is the commitment to a vision the mayor and city council have collectively nurtured. He leaves the city in a strong financial position with most if not all his “Go Big or Go Home” goals accomplished. He also leaves the city in good hands with the election of his successor – long-time council member **Brandon Hembree**, who will sworn in in January 2022.

2021 saw another long-term member of city council decide to not seek re-election after deciding to move to the coast of Georgia. **Susie Walker** will be missed as well but we are blessed to have two new council members join the team after winning their seats in a special election – **Mason Roszel** and **Jenn Thatcher**. Congratulations are also in order for the re-election of two other members – **Mayor Pro Tem Taylor Anderson** and **Nick Greene**.

These are exciting times in Sugar Hill. The completion of Highway 20, investments in city parks, the Sugar Hill Greenway, appreciation for our veterans, world class county parks, top-notch public schools and the award-winning Bowl, Eagle Theatre and E Center have all served as catalysts in the Sugar Hill renaissance. The remarkable transformation of our downtown landscape continues to attract new residents, new businesses, and new investments.

You know, success is measured by how you adapt to change. I think we have done that well and that is why Sugar Hill remains one of the top places to live, visit and invest.

On behalf of the management and staff of the city, we appreciate the support provided by the Mayor and Council, our volunteers and the community at large. We look forward to working with each of you in 2022 and beyond.

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