

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION  
COUNCIL MEETING  
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN  
FEBRUARY 20, 2014  
NOON**

**MINUTES**

The February meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, February 20, 2014 at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn. Vice Chairman Frank Turner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Graham, Pat  
Blechinger, Linda  
Graham, Ernie  
Eisenman, Emily  
Houston, Lamar  
Lyon, Tommy  
Palmer, Bill  
Bullard, Ed  
Trammell, Gene  
Nalls, Billy  
Dove, Anthony  
Gandy, Roy  
Ainslie, Andy  
Perriman, Fred  
Ellis, Keith  
Roseberry, Jerry  
Turner, Frank  
Davis, Melvin  
Ivie, Charles  
Harden, Amrey  
Pittard, Billy  
Boggs, Ronnie  
Fordyce, Cary

**Members Absent:**

Denson, Nancy  
Guest, Larry  
Wright, Glenn  
Finch, Charles  
Crow, Tom  
Plott, Roy  
Fenn, Josh  
Thurman, Larry  
Blackmon, Jody  
Brooks, Stenette  
Johnson, Jesse  
Little, Kevin  
Thompson, Greg  
Knight, Harry  
Creel, Wanda  
Roberts, Roy  
Lewis, Vince

**Staff Present:**

Jim Dove, Executive Director  
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant  
Evans Brinson, Comptroller  
Rima Sullivan, Youth Program Specialist  
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director  
Nina Kelly, Project Manager

**Associate Members Present:**

Ouzts, Buddy  
Horton, Harold  
Seymour, Joel  
Pitts, Flemmie  
Crawford, Charlie

**Media Present:**

Michael Prochaska

**Guests Present:**

Barton Lowrey  
Kathy Papa  
David Dyer  
Jane Burrell  
Tim Blaydes  
Tate O'Rouke

## **CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF JANUARY MEETING MINUTES**

Vice Chairman Frank Turner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, and staff. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the January meeting. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Gene Trammell and seconded by Commissioner Anthony Dove. The motion carried unanimously.

### **ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST**

**Newton County:** Transportation projects are progressing very well in the County, with three major ones scheduled over the next few months. From an economic standpoint, the Water and Sewer Authority has completed a wastewater line from the City of Covington to Baxter International. Commissioner Ellis praised the City for outstanding improvements to downtown, and highlighted various filming taking place in the area. There has been an increase in housing permits, and two subdivisions are being located in the County. Improvements to the water system are ongoing. The County BOC is addressing the form of government. An Assistant County Manager was recently promoted from within that will take the Manager's position upon his retirement later in the year.

**Oconee County:** Caterpillar is starting a second line of equipment, which will mean additional jobs. They currently have 325 employees, and it is expected that there will be 600 by the end of the year. A high tech company will be locating on a 100 acre tract near Caterpillar. Development along Epps Bridge Parkway has increased the sales tax for Oconee County 10-12% each month over the previous year. A recent survey of automobile license plates indicated that 71.6% of shoppers at Epps Bridge Center were from out of the County. The County sales tax revenues now exceed property tax revenues. Right-of-way acquisition for Phase I of the Mars Hill project is nearing completion, and the construction contract will be let soon. It is slated to begin in June or July. The Board of Commissioners is in the process of prioritizing SPLOST projects for 2015. Revenues generated are expected to be \$55 million, with 14% going to the municipalities.

**Oglethorpe County:** The County Transportation Plan has been completed by GDOT, and the final stakeholder's meeting was held recently. Commissioner Billy Pittard expressed appreciation to other local governments that called to offer assistance during the recent ice storm. The Fiscal Year ended in the black, and the audit process will begin soon. The County is continuing its branding process and, as part of the effort, public surveys have been completed. J&J Chemical will be expanding in the County, and a Mexican restaurant has opened in Crawford. The City of Lexington passed beer and wine by the drink, and is pleased to have Sabine's Cafe in town.

**Walton County:** No report.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Audit & Finance:** The Committee met prior to the Council meeting, and members reviewed the financial statements for the seven-month period ending January 31, 2014. A review of the account balances indicated the sound financial condition of the Regional Commission. Cash and near-cash assets exceed total liabilities, excluding the capital lease obligation, by \$820,000. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$3,144. Financial activity for the seven-month period was approximately 7/12<sup>th</sup> of the budget. A motion to approve the financial statement as presented was made by Commissioner Anthony Dove and seconded by Commissioner Pittard. The motion carried unanimously.

**Program of Work:** The Program of Work Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the following technical assistance requests for the month:

1. **ELBERT COUNTY** – Assistance in developing an Urban Redevelopment Plan. This plan will concentrate on the Porter Drive neighborhood. This project will begin after July 1<sup>st</sup>, and any applicable fees will be provided by the County after determining the project's scope.
2. **CITY OF GOOD HOPE** – An update to the Land Development Ordinances and Zoning Regulations. The fees for this assistance will be determined at a later date after staff discussions with the Mayor.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the requests for inclusion in the FY14 Program of Work, effective February 20, 2014, was made by Commissioner Pittard and seconded by Mr. Ronnie Boggs. The motion carried unanimously.

**Planning & Government Services:** The Committee met prior to the meeting and discussed several items of interest. The first item for discussion was an active Development of Regional Impact (DRI) review in Newton County. This DRI is known as DRI #2383 and proposes to develop an 81-acre site into a wholesale and distribution facility. The Committee received a project summary and will have several days to review before providing opinions to Regional Commission staff. NEGRC expects to issue its finding on this DRI by February 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Human Services:** Committee Chairman Melvin Davis advised that material to be included in his report will be presented by Youth Program Specialist Rima Sullivan later in the meeting.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Staff is in full swing with the retreat season. In January, retreats were held for the Newton County Department Managers, Newton County Board of Commissioners, City of Jefferson Mayor and Council, and Social Circle Mayor and Council. In February, sessions have been completed for the Madison Mayor and Council and Hoschton Mayor and Council, and on Friday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, the annual session for the Elbert County Board of Commissioners will be held at Lake Russell. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, a

session will be conducted for the City of Porterdale Mayor and Council. Sessions are scheduled in March for the Elberton Mayor and Council and the Braselton Mayor and Council.

The General Assembly has been moving rapidly this year in order to adjourn with plenty of time left before the primaries to be held in May. There has not been much legislation this session that directly affects Regional Commissions. The one piece of legislation that does is that which creates a Department of Aging and makes it a stand alone agency as opposed to being part of the Department of Human Services (DHS). Many people feel that the current setup as a department in DHS is detrimental to aging efforts statewide, because it is a small division in a huge department that is often asked to give up a disproportionate share of its budget during lean times. The Council will be kept abreast of this situation.

Internally, staff Department Heads will devote time during March to evaluating staff. This exercise is very important, and it is done on an annual basis. The evaluations are discussed with individual staff members and with the Executive Director prior to being placed in the Personnel File.

There has been a lot of interest in the NEGRC website. Executive Director Dove reviews the monthly report, and the activities are spread equally across departments. It is interesting to note where the requests are generated, and it appears they come from all over the country.

Executive Director Dove advised that the Digital Economy Plan to be expanded on later in the meeting has received considerable media coverage. Local governments will have an interest in these efforts as staff continues to move forward from a technological standpoint.

Due to the inclement weather, the annual orientation, scheduled for February 13<sup>th</sup>, was moved to Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 25 persons have registered thus far.

At this time, Executive Director Dove presented a resolution designating the Regional Commission as the Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging. A motion to adopt said resolution was made by Commissioner Dove and seconded by Mr. Ernie Graham. The motion carried unanimously.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT REPORT**

At this time, Ms. Sullivan gave an in-depth report on Caterpillar and the Summer Youth Program. The Workforce Development Division began the on-the-job training activity with Caterpillar in January. This provides a wage reimbursement to Caterpillar for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) eligible persons for the initial training/employment period. This is based on the new employee's skill level. Local governments and other interested groups will be receiving requests for Summer Work Experience packets by

the end of March. Everyone is encouraged to discuss with their Department Heads summer employment opportunities for approximately 175 youth throughout the region. Wages are paid through WIA funds. Another program of interest is Workforce Fundamentals. This is a five week training program aimed at preparing persons for entry level employment with focus on "soft skills" and occupational skills. Upon successful completion of the training, which is offered by both technical colleges in the area, the trainees are guaranteed an interview with one or more employers who have reviewed the training curriculum and agree interview those successfully completing the training.

### **DIGITAL ECONOMY PLAN**

The next item on the agenda was a report by Planning and Government Services Director Burke Walker and Project Manager Nina Kelly on the Digital Economy Plan. The Regional Commission is working in partnership with the Georgia Technology Authority to develop this regional plan which is part of a statewide initiative that addresses Governor Deal's strategic goals related to economic development, education, public safety, and healthcare. The plans will be the first of their kind, and will be completed on a staggered basis by individual Regional Commissions. It will document the resources and needs of Northeast Georgia's digital assets, broadband infrastructure, and technology services and uses. From there, the information will be used to form strategies for filling gaps in the region. When completed, it will become an important part of the region's overall economic development strategy. A survey was provided to Council members for their review, completion, and submittal when time permits. Survey results will be used to develop a comprehensive assessment and to learn how local governments and other public/nonprofit agencies are using digital technologies.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

The next meeting will be held on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck  
Executive Assistant