

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN
APRIL 17, 2014
NOON**

MINUTES

The April meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, April 17, 2014 at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn. Vice Chairman Frank Turner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Members Present:

Blechinger, Linda
Eisenman, Emily
Houston, Lamar
Brock, Phil
Trammell, Gene
Dove, Anthony
Gandy, Roy
Ainslie, Andy
Perriman, Fred
Brooks, Stenette
Ellis, Keith
Roseberry, Jerry
Turner, Frank
Davis, Melvin
Ivie, Charles
Harden, Amrey
Pittard, Billy
Boggs, Ronnie
Johnson, Jesse
Roberts, Roy

Members Absent:

Graham, Pat
Graham, Ernie
Denson, Nancy
Lyon, Tommy
Guest, Larry
Palmer, Bill
Bullard, Ed
Finch, Charles
Crow, Tom
Plott, Roy
Fenn, Josh
Alexander, Kathryn
Nalls, Billy
Blackmon, Jody
Little, Kevin
Thompson, Greg
Knight, Harry
Fordyce, Cary
Lewis, Vince

Associate Members Present:

Ouzts, Buddy
Horton, Harold
Seymour, Joel
Adams, Louise
Crawford, Charlie

Guests Present:

Frank Ginn
Gary Gerrard
Marsay Simpson
T.K. Adams
Kathy Papa
Barry Dunlap
Stami Williams
Michael Harden
Jennie Agerton
Mario Bolanos
Peggy Hackett

Staff Present:

Jim Dove, Executive Director
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant
Evans Brinson, Comptroller
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director
John Devine, Senior Planner

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MARCH MEETING MINUTES

Vice Chairman Turner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, and staff. Prior to approval of minutes, Chairman Frank Turner asked Executive Director Dove to introduce new members to the Council. Mayor Phil Brock, City of Woodville, will be the Municipal Representative from Jasper County. He is a former school Superintendent and has served as Mayor for several years. Kathryn Alexander, who was not in attendance, will represent the municipalities in Jasper County. Ms. Alexander is a long-time Councilmember with the City of Monticello.

Vice Chairman Turner asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March meeting. Such a motion was made by Mayor Linda Blechinger and seconded by Commissioner Keith Ellis. The motion carried unanimously.

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Jackson County: No report.

Jasper County: Commissioner Gene Trammell advised that the County has a fine Board of Commissioners, and the future looks very bright in Jasper County. Norton Packaging, a 76,000 sq. ft. facility that makes heavy plastic shipping containers and created 90 new jobs, is fully operational.

Madison County: The Ag Day Celebration held recently was well attended. Commissioner Anthony Dove expressed appreciation to Senator Frank Ginn for his loyalty and dedication to his constituents. One business in the industrial park is new, and an existing business is undergoing an expansion. The County will soon let LMIG projects, and cash reserves will be added to these funds in order to expand on projects. A new Mexican restaurant recently located in the City of Danielsville.

Morgan County: The City of Madison received a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for storm water improvements. The City, with assistance from NEGRC, has applied for a CDBG for housing rehabilitation. Other projects in the City are a 44-unit affordable senior housing unit and the Gilmore House project, a vacant over-sized dwelling that will be utilized as a mixed-use facility. Morgan County is the first in the State to be designated a "Purple Heart" community. This designation is a way of honoring men and women in uniform who have been wounded or killed in the service of their country. The County, in cooperation with the City of Madison, recently dedicated the new storm shelter that will accommodate 200 persons. A "Zoo Safari" complex will be constructed on 600 acres at Highway 83 and Interstate 20. The annual Tour of Homes will be held the first weekend in May. Expansion projects on three existing businesses are ongoing.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit & Finance: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the financial statements for the nine-month period ending March 31st. A review of the account balances indicates the sound financial condition of the Regional Commission, with cash and near-cash assets exceeding total liabilities, excluding the capital lease obligation, by \$799,000. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$12,287. Financial activity for the nine-month period was approximately 3/4ths of the annual 2014 Budget. A motion to approve the financial statement as presented was made by Mr. Turner and seconded by Mr. Amrey Harden. 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. **WALTON COUNTY** – Assistance in developing a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. There are no fees required, as it is covered under the NEGRC's GDOT Contract.
2. **CITY OF MADISON** – Assistance in preparing a re-application for a 2014 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for housing rehabilitation. The fee for this assistance is \$1,000.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the technical assistance requests for the month for inclusion in the 2014 Program of Work, effective April 17, 2014, was made by Mr. Ronnie Boggs and seconded by Dr. Stenette Brooks. The motion carried unanimously.

Human Services: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting and heard a review of the Coordinated Transportation Grant from Peggy Hackett, the region's Transportation Coordinator. Ms. Hackett reported on FY2014 activities and plans for FY2015. She stressed the fine job current subcontractors have done this Fiscal Year. These subcontractors are Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, Elbert County Transit, Jackson County Transit, Morgan County Transit, Thorne Transportation, and Walton County Senior Citizens Council. It is anticipated that subcontractors for FY2015 will include Elbert Transit, Jackson County Transit, Morgan County Transit, and Thorne Transportation. A valuable component of the Coordinated Transportation efforts in our region are the County senior centers that provide transportation for the senior citizens to and from their facilities. After arrangements are concrete for FY2015, the Human Services Committee will review the results and report their findings to the Council.

Personnel: The Personnel Committee met prior to the Council meeting to conduct the annual evaluation of the Executive Director. A draft will be distributed to the full Council for review and comment, and it will be presented to the Council for consideration at the June meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Dove advised that the recent ACCG Annual Conference was a big success and was well attended. Chairman Kevin Little was sworn in as ACCG President by Governor Deal, and Commissioner Tommy Lyon was elected as 2nd Vice President, Billy Pittard will be the 5th District Representative on the Board of Managers, and Commissioner Melvin Davis was the winner of the Emory Greene Award. Executive Director Dove attended some great presentations while there including one by Paul Bowers, President of the Georgia Power Company; an excellent discussion on GIS, and a panel discussion regarding media relations. He was in charge of setting up the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions' exhibit, and manned the booth along with representatives of five other Regional Commissions.

Executive Director Dove attended the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) meeting in Washington. He was elected 1st Vice President, effective July 1, 2015. and will serve as Chair of next year's conference. Director of Planning & Government Services Burke Walker made a presentation on Asset Based Development while attending the conference. Overlapping the DDAA Conference was the National Association of Development Organizations' (NADO) Policy Conference, and Executive Director Dove also serves on the Board of that organization. He was part of a small contingent that met with, and presented awards to, Senator Saxby Chambliss and Senator Johnny Isakson. In addition, he was part of a group that presented awards and met with Representative Hal Rogers of Kentucky, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, and Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia.

The May meeting is always special, because the Council presents the annual awards, those being the Distinguished Northeast Georgia Service Award and the Local Government Administrator of the Year Award. Chairman Little was contacted, and appointed Mayor Jerry Roseberry, Committee Chairman; Mr. Harold Horton; and Mr. Frank Turner to an Awards Committee. They met briefly following the meeting to discuss candidates for these awards.

Staff evaluations have been ongoing and are virtually complete. Each evaluation is discussed individually with staff, signed, and placed in their Personnel File.

2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATE

At this time, State Senator Frank Ginn gave an update on the 2014 session of the General Assembly. He emphasized that the only requirement for legislators every year is to develop and pass a Budget. Senator Ginn highlighted several bills from the recently completed session. Some of these include:

- H.B. 128 – Georgia Downtown Renaissance Investment Tax Credit Act
- S.B. 297 – Declaration of Intent Requirement for Local Elections
- H.B. 658 – Repeal of Georgia State Tax
- H.B. 772 – Drug Testing for Applicants and Recipients of Public Assistance

- H.B. 990 – Prohibits the Expansion of Medicaid Eligibility without Prior Legislative Approval
- H.B. 60 – Safe Carry Protection Act
- H.B. 770 – Creation of Crimes of Home Invasion
- S.B. 299 – Watershed Protection Standards
- H.B. 176 – Mobile Broadband Infrastructure Leads to Development Act

Following review of these pieces of legislation, Senator Ginn addressed questions and comments from members of the Council.

REGIONAL TOURISM PLAN UPDATE AND BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITIES

At this time, Senior Planner John Devine delivered a presentation to the Council regarding the Northeast Georgia Regional Tourism Strategy, the Georgia Trail Summit, and the Firefly Trail. The Regional Tourism Study, set to be completed in June, will communicate the value of tourism as an economic development tool, promote regional coordination and dialog on an ongoing basis, and provide strategies to facilitate tourism development. The inaugural Georgia Trail Summit, which took place in Athens April 10th and 12th, allowed its 150 attendees to discuss planning, constructing, and maintaining trails for walking, bicycling, paddling, and equestrian use. Along with other local, regional, and statewide organizations, the NEGRC was a major sponsor of this event, which was “a monumental success,” in the words of one Northeast Georgia city manager. Finally, the Firefly Trail is a 39-mile rails-to-trails project planned in Athens-Clarke County, Oglethorpe County, and Greene County. Firefly’s third annual “Ticket to Ride” event was held on March 22nd, and drew 200 cyclists interested in learning about the project and experiencing the communities located along the historic route (the Georgia Railroad’s former “Athens Branch”). Construction for the first eight-tenths of a mile is slated to begin in 2015 in Athens-Clarke County, where a 500 foot-long bridge will stand 50 feet above the North Oconee River entering Dudley Park. The Firefly Trail also has a new website, which is hosted at fireflytrail.com.

OTHER BUSINESS

The next meeting will be held on May 15th.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck
Executive Assistant