

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING / ANNUAL MEETING
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN
MAY 15, 2014
NOON**

MINUTES

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

Members Present:

Graham, Pat
Blechinger, Linda
Graham, Ernie
Eisenman, Emily
Lyon, Tommy
Palmer, Bill
Bullard, Ed
Plott, Roy
Fenn, Josh
Nalls, Billy
Dove, Anthony
Ainslie, Andy
Perriman, Fred
Brooks, Stenette
Ellis, Keith
Roseberry, Jerry
Turner, Frank
Ivie, Charles
Harden, Amrey
Pittard, Billy
Boggs, Ronnie
Little, Kevin
Fordyce, Cary
Roberts, Roy

Members Absent:

Denson, Nancy
Houston, Lamar
Guest, Larry
Brock, Phil
Finch, Charles
Crow, Tom
Trammell, Gene
Alexander, Katherine
Blackmon, Jody
Gandy, Roy
Davis, Melvin
Johnson, Jesse
Thompson, Greg
Knight, Harry

Associate Members Present:

Ouzts, Buddy
Seymour, Joel
Crawford, Charlie

Guests Present:

Frank Ginn
Michael Lamar
Julian Jackson
Gary Gerrard
Barton Lowrey
Kathy Papa
Brenda Dove
Lisa Ransom
Cheryl Smith
Craig Intro

Staff Present:

Jim Dove, Executive Director
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant
Evans Brinson, Comptroller
Carol R. Cofer, Workforce Development Director
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director
Nina Kelly, Project Manager
John Devine, Senior Planner

WELCOME AND APPROVAL OF APRIL MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Kevin Little called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, and staff. Prior to approval of minutes, Chairman Little recognized Commissioners from our Region that were elected/appointed to various positions with ACCG. Elbert County Chairman Tommy Lyon was installed as ACCG 2nd Vice President, and Oglethorpe County Chairman Billy Pittard was installed as 5th District Representative on the Board of Managers. Several Northeast Georgia officials hold leadership positions on various policy committees. Commissioner Nancy Schulz of Newton County will Chair the Health and Human Services Committee; Ben Hendrix, Commissioner from Barrow County, will serve as Vice Chair of the Public Safety and the Courts Committee; and Commission Chairman Ed Bullard from Greene County is Vice Chair of the Federal Committee. In addition, Chairman Little mentioned that Oconee County Chairman and ACCG Past President Melvin Davis was the recipient of the prestigious Emory Greene Leadership Award.

Chairman Little asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the April meeting. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Andy Ainslie and seconded by Dr. Stenette Brooks. The motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

The Annual Economic Development Conference of the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions was held on May 4th – 6th at Brasstown Valley. NEGRC was represented by Lamar Houston, Burke Walker, and Executive Director Dove. There were several excellent presentations including those by Karen Fite of Georgia Tech, Phil Paradice of US Economic Development Administration, and panelists discussing agritourism in Georgia. Each Regional Commission is required to send three attendees to this meeting.

At this time, Executive Director Dove advised of the resignation of a member of the Council. As everyone is aware, the Governor has three appointments to the Council, and the Lt. Governor and Speaker each have one appointment. Mr. Vince Lewis of Greene County has served as the Speaker's appointee since legislation changing the structure of the Governing council was enacted in 2009. It has simply gotten to the point that Mr. Lewis has so many commitments, that he is unable to attend on a regular basis. Executive Director Dove expressed appreciation for his contributions during his tenure.

Executive Director Dove will be attending the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Summer Board Meeting in Stevenson, Washington on June 7th – 9th. He is in his sixth term as a Board member of this organization which represents the interests of more than 500 districts such as ours. NADO is a key player in seeing that a number of programs such as EDA, Appalachian Regional Commission, Rural Development, Federal DOT, and HUD continue to receive funding to assist with programs which you deem important. He will give a report on the meeting in June.

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Newton County: No report.

Oconee County: The Oconee County Industrial Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Oconee County School System, and Oconee County are developing an Economic Development video. Discussion between the County and the City of Bogart concerning providing sewer for the downtown business area is ongoing. The Mars Hill widening project – Phase I from Butler’s Crossing to Highway 316 – may be delayed due to Congress not approving the Federal Transportation Bill. This could also affect other projects in the Northeast Georgia region. SPLOST plans and projects are to be finalized by June 3rd for the November referendum; \$55 million is expected to be collected. SPLOST and Sales Tax Revenue have increased due to retail development on Epps Bridge Parkway. The Fiscal Year 2015 Budget is expected to be approved at the June 3rd Board of Commissioners’ meeting. There are two incumbent Commissioners up for election this year, and both have opposition. The University of North Georgia Strategic Planning report will have an impact on the Community and future plans, and the recent legislative session approved a new building for the campus.

Oglethorpe County: The County is beginning the annual budget process, and an increase in the tax digest is not anticipated at this time. A Solar Farm is looking at the County as a possible location; and a decision will be made in December. If this site is chosen, the build-out is slated for late 2015. The audit process is ongoing, and it is projected that the County will be \$500,000 in the Black for the Fiscal Year. Building upgrades are in the final stages, and 10 miles of in-house paving has been completed. Commissioner Pittard expressed appreciation to Mr. Ronnie Boggs for his efforts in helping get tennis courts in the County, and this is projected to happen within the next year.

Walton County: Three years ago, the County returned \$1.3 million to its taxpayers, last year it was \$700,000, and it is estimated that approximately \$300,000 or \$400,000 will be returned to the citizens this year. There will not be a change in the tax digest this year. The Hitachi Building 3 will open in late June, and the facility will create 250 new jobs. Construction on the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir is progressing very well, and officials will be touring the Baxter site on May 19th. Chairman Little advised that 4,000 construction workers will be onsite at Baxter during the summer in order to “speed up” completion of the facility.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit & Finance: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the financial statements for the ten-month period ending April 30, 2014. 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 \$809,000. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$18,717. Financial activity for the ten-month period was approximately 10/12ths of the annual 2014 Budget. A motion to approve the financial statement as presented was made by Mr. Frank Turner and seconded by Mr. Ernie Graham. The motion carried unanimously. The Audit & Finance Committee met with the Personnel Committee last month and recommended that the FY2015 Budget include a salary increase to Regional Commission staff. This resulted in an average increase of 2.76% of salaries over the Revised FY2014 budgeted salaries. The Revised FY2014 and Proposed FY2015 Budgets will be forwarded to Council members prior to the June Council meeting.

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. **CITY OF TALMO** – Comprehensive Plan Update in coordination with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Fees for this assistance will be quoted following further discussions with staff and determination of plan elements.
2. **CITY OF JEFFERSON** – Comprehensive Plan Update in coordination with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Fees for this assistance will be quoted following further discussions with staff and determination of plan elements.

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 May 15, 2014, was made by Commissioner Pittard and seconded by Mr. Boggs. The motion carried unanimously.

Planning & Government Services: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting and discussed several items of interest. One item discussed was the development of the region's Digital Economy Plan. Members reviewed staff efforts to-date and an analysis of broadband strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. The Plan is progressing on schedule, with an expected completion date in Fall 2014. No action was required by the Council.

ANNUAL REPORT OF STAFF ACTIVITIES

Executive Director Dove gave an in-depth report on staff activities for Fiscal Year 2014 and highlighted accomplishments of each division. He also advised that staff continues to facilitate administrative efforts relative to the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority, and he and Executive Assistant Mott Beck continue to facilitate retreats/planning sessions for local governments and related organizations throughout the region. A total of 100 such sessions have been conducted to date. A copy of the Staff Activities Report is on file at Regional Commission Headquarters.

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

The next item on the agenda was presentation of awards that are given annually by the Regional Commission. **Frank Ginn**, Georgia State Senator, was named recipient of the Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian Award. Senator Ginn graduated from the University of Georgia in 1985 with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering; and following in both parents' career paths, he started working in the electric utility industry as a Member Services Representative in the consumer owned cooperative Jackson EMC. He later worked with the Cities of Royston and Sugar Hill where he held the position of Manager. In 2000, the citizens of Franklin County voted to change to the County Manager form of government, and the Board of Commissioners invited Senator Ginn to serve as the first County Manager. He held this position until being elected to the Georgia State Senate in 2010, representing the 47th District which includes Barrow and Madison Counties and parts of Clarke and Jackson Counties. He serves as Chairman of the Economic Development Committee, and Secretary to the Agriculture Committee. He and his wife Robin and daughter Catherine live on the family farm in Madison County.

Morgan County Manager **Michael Lamar** was the recipient of the Local Government Administrator of the Year Award. He was raised in Port Orange, Florida and graduated from the University of Florida in 1994 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science. He went on to earn a Master of Public Administration Degree at the University of Georgia. Mr. Lamar was hired as the County Manager of Morgan County in 2005. Prior to that, he worked as Assistant County Manager in Volusia County, Florida and City Manager of Trenton Florida, where he had many extra responsibilities such as Finance Officer, Grant Writer, Personnel Director and the City's FEMA Disaster Relief Coordinator during the 2004 hurricanes. Mr. Lamar is a very dedicated and motivated individual who always strives to go above and beyond the call of duty to serve the Board of Commissioners and the citizens of Morgan County.

OTHER BUSINESS

The next meeting will be held on June 19th.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck
Executive Assistant