

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN
MARCH 21, 2013
NOON**

MINUTES

The regular monthly meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, March 21, 2013 at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn. Chairman Jim Joiner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Members Present:

Graham, Pat
Blechinger, Linda
Graham, Ernie
Houston, Lamar
Bullard, Ed
Finch, Charles
Joiner, Jim
Pennamon, Carl
Gandy, Roy
Perriman, Fred
Brooks, Stenette
Ellis, Keith
Roseberry, Jerry
Turner, Frank
Davis, Melvin
Ivie, Charles
Pittard, Billy
Boggs, Ronnie
Johnson, Jesse
Little, Kevin
Ainslie, Andy

Members Absent:

Denson, Nancy
Eisenman, Emily
Lyon, Tommy
Guest, Larry
Palmer, Bill
Wright, Glenn
Crow, Tom
Thurman, Larry
Nalls, Billy
Dove, Anthony
Blackmon, Jody
Harden, Amrey
Thompson, Greg
Knight, Harry
Lee, Kay
Roberts, Roy
Lewis, Vince

Staff Present:

Jim Dove, Executive Director
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant
Evans Brinson, Comptroller
John Devine, Senior Planner

Associate Members Present:

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

Guests Present:

Jock Connell
Lorrie Smith
Nancy Bobbitt
Barton Lowrey
Jordan Chinouth
Kathy Papa
Leslie Crawford

Media Present:

Michael Prochaska
Oconee Enterprise

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Joiner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, media, and staff. He asked for a motion to approve the February meeting minutes. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Kevin Little and seconded by Mr. Ernie Graham. The motion carried unanimously.

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Newton County: The County has a new Chairman and two new Commissioners. Chairman Ellis expressed appreciation to the Regional Commission and staff for all they do for Newton County. The unemployment rate in Newton County is 10%, and it is anticipated that this percentage will decrease with the location of Baxter and Caterpillar. In the last three months, five building permits have been issued, which is the most in four years. A county wide base ordinance will be developed for the 2050 Development Plan. The existing reservoir is at full pool, and construction on the new reservoir is slated to begin soon. DOT has plans for several widening projects on Highway 278 throughout Covington and Newton County.

Oconee County: Oconee County has been named the second healthiest County in the state, and has one of the state's lowest unemployment rates. Single-family home and commercial building permits have increased significantly. The City of Watkinsville is proceeding with sewer line expansion to the Industrial Park. Expansion of the Chamber of Commerce facility will be completed within the next few months. After less than 36 months since groundbreaking, Caterpillar has moved into an 875,000 sq. ft. facility and will employ 1,400 persons when fully implemented. Two new industries that will supply Caterpillar have located in Watkinsville. A "Welcome to the Region" event, hosted by Athens-Clarke and Oconee Counties, will be held on April 20th for employees that are now housed at Caterpillar. The movie theater located in Epps Bridge Center will be opening at the end of May. The Industrial Development Authority has contributed funds to hire an additional part-time employee to work in the County's Economic Development Department. Oconee County, in cooperation with Walton County, has acquired a \$20 million low interest loan for the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir. The interest rate will be zero during construction, 1% after construction, and there will be no closing costs.

Oglethorpe County: The County recently hired a new Clerk. The major focus in Oglethorpe County at this time is planning, and a stakeholder meeting will be held on April 16th to review and discuss long-range transportation planning and priorities for the future. The County is in the process of exploring branding, which should aid in economic development efforts. The County has contracted with a firm to conduct a water study to address water needs for the next 50 years. Chairman Pittard asked everyone to think about the possibility of coming together

as a region to participate in LIDAR Imagery. The County has applied for a grant to aid in the construction of public tennis courts adjacent to the school.

Walton County: A road at Hard Labor Creek is being realigned, and a 700 ft. bridge will be built prior to construction of the dam. It is anticipated that ground breaking for the dam will be held by July. The County is working on the budget, and the Tax Assessor has advised that the tax digest will remain at the same level as last year. It is anticipated that Walton County employees will receive a salary increase this year, which will be the first in six years. The Highway 138 extension is underway and will connect the corridor from the end of Highway 78 to Highway 11. Walton County is one of the final three prospects for a \$40 million industry. The BOC voted to suspend Impact Fees for an unlimited time; however, the fees can be resumed if needed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit & Finance: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting and reviewed the financial statements for the eight-month period ending February 28, 2013. 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 \$711,000. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$14,104. Financial activity for the eight-month period was approximately 2/3rds of the annual FY2013 Budget. A motion to approve the financial report as presented was made by Mr. Frank Turner and seconded by Mr. Lamar Houston. 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. **CITY OF GREENSBORO** – Assistance in preparing GIS mapping and data integration as part of a citywide housing inventory.
2. **CITY OF WINDER** – Assistance in preparing an Opportunity Zone application for submission to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the technical assistance requests for the month for inclusion in the FY2013 Program of work, effective March 21, 2013, was made by Commissioner Billy Pittard and seconded by Mr. Graham. The motion carried unanimously.

Human Services: The Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the proposals for Coordinated Transportation services for FY2014. Proposals received and reviewed were from Advantage Behavioral Health Systems, Elbert County Transit, Jackson County Transit, Morgan County Transit, T&T Transportation, and Walton County Senior Citizens Council. NEGRC staff will now negotiate subcontractor payment rates and actual services to be provided by the selected subcontractors. After negotiations have been completed, the Committee will review the results and make a report at the April Council meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Since the last meeting, Executive Director Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck have facilitated retreats for Elbert County and the Cities of Braselton and Jefferson. They will facilitate a session for the City of Elberton on Saturday, March 23rd.

Executive Director Dove attended both the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) legislative conferences held in Washington March 10th – 13th. He is a member of the Board of Directors of NADO and an officer of the DDAA. Meeting topics focused on the state of the budget and sequestration.

Executive Director Dove advised that the annual evaluation of employees would begin the first week in April. All evaluations will be completed by the end of the month.

Annual awards are given annually in May, and Executive Director Dove requested that nominations be submitted for consideration. Awards given are Distinguished Northeast Georgian and Local Government Administrator of the Year. Chairman Joiner will appoint a Nominating Committee to meet after the Council meeting next month.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA AND THE STATE

At this time, Walt Farrell and Lonnie Smallwood of Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) gave a report on economic development in Northeast Georgia and the State. An advocate of local communities' infrastructure and economic success, ECG serves as a liaison on behalf of municipalities in Georgia. The Economic & Community Development Team of ECG seeks to work alongside business owners to find the ideal location and meet the unique needs of any business. ECG's statewide economic development efforts allows them to be a full partner with its communities to identify high growth domestic and international businesses through industrial and commercial recruitment. ECG's community development services offer participants customized technical solutions with professional research, mapping, and an array of marketing solutions to assist local communities with business recruitment efforts. The community development group provides professional development and strategic planning programs to develop leaders and gain targeted expertise and best practices for advancing their communities. Georgia continues to attract successful companies due to a pro-business environment, a talented workforce, world-class infrastructure, and unparalleled access to the world market. ECG offers a performance-based package of business assistance designed to foster success for companies and communities they call home. In combination with inducements available from many local municipalities and counties, ECG can help new or expanding industries get the good start they need and continue to be successful in the future.

WATER QUALITY PLANNING

The next item on the agenda was a report by Senior Planner John Devine regarding water quality planning in Northeast Georgia. Every county in the region contains at least one entry on Georgia's 303(d) list of streams that do not meet established water quality standards. The NEGRC's Planning and Government Services Division contracts annually with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Environmental Protection Division to conduct planning activities aimed at reducing non-point source pollution in the region's watersheds. Funding typically involves writing or implementing Watershed Management Plans, with implementation focusing on installation of best management practices and contributing to de-listing of contaminated streams. While the associated grants are split 60/40, the 40% local match often relies heavily on in-kind, non-cash contributions from grant partners, which include the NEGRC, the local government, and local nonprofit organizations.

OTHER BUSINESS

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 18th.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck
Executive Assistant