

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION  
COUNCIL MEETING  
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2013  
NOON**

**MINUTES**

The September meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, September 19, 2013 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  
Houston, Lamar  
Lyon, Tommy  
Bullard, Ed  
Crow, Tom  
Joiner, Jim  
Fenn, Josh  
Nalls, Billy  
Dove, Anthony  
Ainslie, Andy  
Brooks, Stenette  
Ellis, Keith  
Roseberry, Jerry  
Davis, Melvin  
Harden, Amrey  
Pittard, Billy  
Boggs, Ronnie  
Little, Kevin  
Lewis, Vince

**Members Absent:**

Graham, Ernie  
Denson, Nancy  
Eisenman, Emily  
Guest, Larry  
Palmer, Bill  
Wright, Glenn  
Finch, Charles  
Pennamon, Carl  
Thurman, Larry  
Blackmon, Jody  
Gandy, Roy  
Turner, Frank  
Ivie, Charles  
Johnson, Jesse  
Thompson, Greg  
Knight, Harry  
Lee, Kay  
Roberts, Roy

**Associate Members Present:**

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

**Guests Present:**

Donnie Thomas  
Cosby Johnson  
Ron Griffith  
Chris Edwards  
Nancy Bobbitt  
Barry Dunlap

**Staff Present:**

Jim Dove, Executive Director  
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant  
Evans Brinson, Comptroller  
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director  
Kenny Gilbert, GIS Planner

## CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF AUGUST MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Kevin Little called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, and staff. He asked for a motion to approve the August meeting minutes. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Billy Pittard and seconded by Dr. Stenette Brooks. The motion carried unanimously.

## ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

**Jackson County:** The Board of Commissioners continues to work on the FY14 Budget, and this year there is another decrease in the Tax Digest. The County has several road and bridge projects ongoing. Commissioner Tom Crow was happy to announce that the Chamber of Commerce is now staffed and introduced the new Director, Josh Fenn. Mr. Fenn gave a report on some of the economic development projects ongoing in the County. Toyota recently announced a \$180 million expansion that will create 120 new jobs. He also advised that the Chamber's Economic Development Program is being restructured. Mr. Fenn will serve as Jackson County's Private Sector Representative on the Council.

**Jasper County:** Mr. Billy Nalls gave the report and advised that an old historic building on the square is being demolished. Construction on the Norton Building is ongoing. The contract has been let for construction of turn lanes on Highway 16 West. The Legislative Watchdog Group has voiced concerns over two roads in the County that have been graveled.

**Madison County:** Danielsville will be hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Festival. Jackson EMC is constructing a new facility on Highway 29 North. LMIG resurfacing projects have been completed, and Commissioner Anthony Dove was pleased to announce that the millage rate will remain the same as last year.

**Morgan County:** Mr. Andy Ainslie reported that the Morgan County Retreat held at Camp Twin Lakes and facilitated by Executive Director Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck was very productive. Topics addressed at the session included a potential credit union for employees, farmer's market, CUVA, and grant writing. The County recently broke ground for a new Tornado Shelter, and funds from FEMA and GEMA will be utilized for this project. A lumber company will be locating in the public safety complex. LOST negotiations continue between the County and the City of Madison.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Audit & Finance:** Members of the Committee met prior to the Council meeting and reviewed the Comparative Statement of Revenues and Expenses for the month ending August 31, 2013. A review of the account balances indicates that the Regional Commission is in sound financial condition, with cash and near-

cash assets exceeding total liabilities, excluding the capital lease obligation, by \$715,000. Revenues exceed expenses by \$1,832, and the financial activity for the two-month period was approximately 2/12ths of the annual FY14 Budget. A motion to approve the financial statement as presented was made by Mr. Amrey Harden and seconded by Commissioner Ed Bullard. The motion carried unanimously. Committee members also heard a report from Mr. Chris Edwards of the auditing firm of Clifton, Lipford, Hardison & Parker regarding the audit report for FY13, which will be presented later in the 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 SOCIAL CIRCLE** – Assistance in GIS mapping as an ongoing service. The fee for this assistance will be based on actual staff hours required and invoiced on a quarterly basis.
2. **TOWN OF CARL** – Assistance in preparing an update to the Town's Short Term Work Program. The project's total cost of \$6,225 will be cost shared with the DCA contract, resulting in a \$600 fee.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the technical assistance requests for the month for inclusion in the FY2014 Program of Work, effective September 19, 2013, was made by Commissioner Pittard and seconded by Commissioner Tommy Lyon.

### **PRESENTATION OF FY13 AUDIT**

At this time, Mr. Edwards gave a report on the recently completed FY13 Audit. He advised that the Audit team from his firm conducting the Audit reported a very good experience, with an extremely well prepared and helpful staff. There were neither findings nor questionable costs. The organization has \$728,000 in unrestricted funds, which is very commendable. The Audit received an Unqualified Opinion, the highest audit rating given.

### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Director Dove met with the new DCA Commissioner, Gretchen Corbin, on September 5<sup>th</sup>. She previously served as Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Economic Development, where she worked closely on the Caterpillar, Baxter, and many other high profile efforts. The Commissioner is a very engaging person, she certainly has the Governor's ear on a variety of topics, and she continues to stress the importance of job creation as a key component of the Deal platform. Commissioner Corbin has announced the following staff changes: Phil Foil will now be Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Phil Smith will join the staff as Chief Operating Officer, Niki Knox will be Legislative Director, and James Thompson, ARC Program Manager, is retiring and will be replaced by Michael Harden.

Director Dove advised that Chris Commisky was leaving his position as Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Economic Development to accept a job with the Southern Company. He will be replaced by Chris Carr, who was Chief of Staff for Senator Isakson. Director Dove met with Mr. Carr in the past on matters such as T-SPLOST and others. Mr. Carr is a very talented individual and will do an excellent job in his new position.

Director Dove recently attended the Annual Training Conference of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) in San Francisco. NEGRRC received an Innovation

Award for its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update. The CEDS is a requirement of the Federal Economic Development Administration. The format has changed somewhat, and NEGRC staff worked to make the document more user friendly, more beneficial to the local governments, and truly representative of the efforts of the many stakeholders involved, thus NEGRC was recognized by NADO for this endeavor.

The Joint Development Authority of Northeast Georgia was founded in 1994 and promotes economic development on a regional level. The number of counties involved fluctuated through the years, as the rules of participation changed. As late as 2009, there were four member counties. Since that time, membership has increased to six counties including Clarke, Elbert, Jackson, Madison, Oconee, and Oglethorpe. As of this month, Barrow County will become its newest member. Each member county's Chief Elected Official serves as the official member, and designates a "director" to serve on the Authority Board. The aforementioned updated CEDS identifies the Joint Development Authority to assist in the implementation of 12 regional strategies to enable economic development opportunities.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UPDATE**

Donnie Thomas of the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA-RD) presented an update on loan and financing programs available to local governments. Mr. Thomas serves as the Assistant to the State Director in the Athens USDA-RD headquarters. NEGRC Council members learned about efforts to reach out and serve communities that need financing for infrastructure projects, support to rural businesses, and housing. He began his presentation with highlights of several popular USDA-RD programs and distributed handouts. He first described the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans (B&I) program, stating that \$60 million was used this year to provide financial support to rural businesses. Projects using this program were typically small manufacturing operations. He also mentioned the popular Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program. Typically, USDA-RD receives approximately 50 applications each year with about 13-14 applications receiving awards. Mr. Thomas advised that Development Authorities can also seek funding to benefit a rural business. Another program highlighted was the Community Facility Program, a financing program that provides assistance to rural communities of less than 20,000 people and typically less than 5,000. It may be used for the development and construction of essential community facilities like medical facilities, fire & police stations, and daycare centers. Other USDA-RD programs highlighted were the Water, Wastewater, and Solid Waste Systems loan program, the Rural Rental Housing Loans (Section 538), which can greatly reduce monthly rent for low and moderate income persons, and the Home Ownership Loan program.

## **GIS SERVICES UPDATE AND BUSINESS ANALYST TOOL**

At this time, GIS Specialist Kenny Gilbert gave an update on services offered through GIS, and talked about the new business Analyst Tool. GIS is a system to gather, store, display, and analyze geographic/spatial data. This data is used to produce maps, reports, and spatial analysis. Maps and data offered through GIS play a large part in economic development projects, transportation planning, environmental protection, and custom mapping. The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) has an Enterprise License Agreement (ELA) with the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) that provides each of Georgia's twelve Regional Commissions with top of the line GIS software, training, and technical support. The twelve RCs share the cost for this service; and in turn, receive software at a substantially reduced cost. The Business Analyst Tool is a sophisticated subscription based web application which makes custom site evaluation and market analysis fast and easy. Each RC has one subscription and can obtain up-to-date demographic, spending, business data and projections, and custom and professional reports and maps. Data can be exported to PDF and/or Excel that can be shared with stakeholders, staff, and potential new clients. Since it is web based, this tool can be accessed from anywhere at any time.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

The next meeting will be held on October 17<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