

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN
OCTOBER 17, 2013
NOON**

MINUTES

The October meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, October 17, 2013 at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn. Chairman Kevin Little called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Members Present:

Blechinger, Linda
Lyon, Tommy
Palmer, Bill
Bullard, Ed
Finch, Charles
Crow, Tom
Joiner, Jim
Fenn, Josh
Nalls, Billy
Dove, Anthony
Gandy, Roy
Ainslie, Andy
Brooks, Stenette
Roseberry, Jerry
Turner, Frank
Ivie, Charles
Harden, Amrey
Pittard, Billy
Johnson, Jesse
Little, Kevin
Roberts, Roy

Members Absent:

Graham, Pat
Graham, Ernie
Denson, Nancy
Eisenman, Emily
Houston, Lamar
Guest, Larry
Wright, Glenn
Pennamon, Carl
Thurman, Larry
Blackmon, Jody
Ellis, Keith
Davis, Melvin
Boggs, Ronnie
Thompson, Greg
Knight, Harry
Lee, Kay
Lewis, Vince

Associate Members Present:

Horton, Harold
Seymour, Joel
Crawford, Charlie

Guests Present:

Andrew Szwak
Peggy Hackett
Barton Lowrey
Craig Intro
Paul Chambers

Staff Present:

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

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 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 September meeting minutes. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Tommy Lyon and seconded by Commissioner Ed Bullard. The motion carried unanimously.

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Newton County: Executive Director Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck have been in Newton County on several occasions over the past year conducting planning retreats for the Board of Commissioners (BOC), and another session will be held on Monday evening, November 28th. The Cities of Social Circle and Covington, along with Newton County, have reached an agreement on whom (and what amounts) will be providing natural gas to Baxter International. The City of Oxford recently hosted the "Photography Shootout", along with nature photographers. Several hundred people were in the City taking pictures throughout the day.

Oconee County: Groundbreaking for the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir was held on October 4th, and Governor Nathan Deal was the guest speaker. A GEFA loan was utilized to finance the cost of construction. Oconee County owns 28% of this partnership with Walton County. Retail stores continue to open at the Epps Bridge Centre, and store managers report excellent sales. Two Town Hall meetings a year are held in order for citizens to have interaction with the BOC and State Legislators. The Oconee County Fall Festival will be held on Saturday, October 19th in Watkinsville. The Grand Opening for Caterpillar will be held on October 31st, and the facility currently has over 350 employees. Right-of-way acquisition for phase 1 of the Mars Hill widening project is nearing completion, and construction is slated to begin in mid-2014. The process for establishing SPLOST projects has begun, and public hearings will be held in January and February.

Oglethorpe County: Oglethorpe is the featured County in the fall issue of **Georgia County Government Magazine**. The branding process being undertaken by the County is approximately 50% complete, and surveys have been forwarded to individuals in surrounding counties in order to gain an outside perspective regarding this initiative. The "***Legends of Oglethorpe***" will be held on October 26th and 27th from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. at the Goodness Grows Nursery and downtown Lexington. The event is a living history weekend with "in character" actors bringing to life individuals who have been a part of Oglethorpe County's rich history. The County has paved 12+miles of roads internally, and has also paved streets for the City of Crawford. The county has repealed the Business Occupation Tax, and renovation of County facilities is ongoing, which will make them more energy efficient. The Comprehensive Transportation Study,

developed by HNIB and led by GDOT, is nearing completion and will determine the County's future transportation needs and solutions for existing issues. The Tax Digest decreased by 4.6%, and Commissioner Pittard was proud to report that the millage rate has continued to be lowered regardless of the economic downturn.

Walton County: Chairman Little also reported that the groundbreaking for the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir was held, and that the Hitachi Automotive expansion groundbreaking was held immediately following. The Governor was the guest speaker for this event, also. This is a 300,000 sq. ft. expansion, will create 250 new jobs, and is a Work Ready Corporation. The intersection of S.R. 138 and Highway 78 is being redesigned so that S.R. 138 will dead-end at Highway 11 instead of Highway 78. Several movies are being filmed in and around the area. Chairman Little is very excited about "Walton Proud", which was initiated by the Chamber of Commerce and united all schools throughout the County.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit & Finance: Members of the Committee met prior to the Council meeting and reviewed the financial statements for the three-month period ending September 30, 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 \$804,000. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$2,405, and financial activity for the three-month period is approximately 1/4th of the annual 2014 Budget. A motion to approve the financial statement as presented was made by Mr. Frank Turner and seconded by Commissioner Anthony Dove. The motion carried unanimously.

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

1. **CITY OF COMER** – Assistance in preparing GIS mapping for the City's water system. The fee for these maps will be determined after further consultation with City staff.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the technical assistance request for the month for inclusion in the FY2014 Program of Work, effective October 17, 2013, was made by Commissioner Billy Pittard and seconded by Mr. Josh Fenn. The motion carried unanimously. On September 30th the Planning & Government Services Division closed out sixteen formerly requested projects. Letters of notification and project invoices, when appropriate, were sent to each respective local government.

Human Services: In the absence of Commissioner Melvin Davis, Executive Director Dove gave the Committee report. Members heard an update on the Department of Human Services (DHA) Coordinated Transportation Program. Comptroller Evans Brinson advised that subcontractors have been providing a very satisfactory level of service; and compared to last year, complaints from

human service providers have been minimal. Communication between all parties has been excellent and helped create a cooperative work atmosphere. And, again, this is an example of the dramatic improvement in this program. Staff will be reviewing the costs incurred to determine if the desired level of transportation service is being provided at an acceptable level of costs. The Council will receive updates throughout the FY14 contract year.

Planning & Government Services: The Committee met and discussed several items of interest. Members reviewed the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The Council adopted the CEDS Update last October, and the Committee considered the CEDS ongoing implementation and discussed various action items to promote the region's economic development. Progress continues to be made, especially through the efforts of the Joint Development Authority of Northeast Georgia.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck conducted the first session of the Strategic Planning Retreat for Newton County on October 3rd. At that session they conducted a SWOT Analysis and addressed the County's vision and mission statements. Another such session is planned for October 17th to discuss goals, specific objectives, and action plans.

Also, Mr. Dove and Ms. Beck will facilitate a retreat for the Oxford Mayor and Council on October 31st at Oxford College, and they assist with this retreat annually. This year's session will focus on long range capital planning and look at various facets of city government.

On October 4th, Mr. Dove and Ms. Beck attended the groundbreaking for the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir that will serve Walton and Oconee Counties. Governor Nathan Deal was present to be part of the festivities. They then followed the Governor and Walton County dignitaries to the groundbreaking for the Hitachi expansion in Monroe.

On Friday, October 25th, Mr. Dove is invited to make a presentation in Douglasville at the Georgia City County Managers Fall Conference on the roles and responsibilities of Regional Commissions. Several Managers from the Northeast Georgia Region will be in attendance.

On October 16th, Mr. Dove attended the Regional Education and Economic Development (REED) meeting in Dahlonega at the University of North Georgia (UNG) campus. UNG officials held a series of workshops throughout North Georgia during the summer. The meeting in Dahlonega focused on ways in which groups with common interests can work together to further educational and economic development efforts.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

At this time, Workforce Development Director Carol R. Cofer gave an update on Workforce Development issues. She provided a snapshot of the 12-county unemployment rate from August 2012 with a rate of 8.2% to August 2013 with a rate of

7.3%, which was a .9% decrease. From July 2013 to present, 675 adults and dislocated workers and 248 youth are currently in training. An additional 310 persons have received follow-up assistance upon completing training during that same time period; and since July 1, 2013, 106 persons have left training. According to preliminary information, the local area met all of the nine performance measures, and exceeded two. The mobile units have been utilized in Barrow County with the Winder Housing Authority and in Oglethorpe, Oconee, and Madison Counties through a collaborative with the Athens Regional Library System. The units are also providing basic computer instruction in collaboration with GED instruction providers in an effort to prepare persons for the computerized version of the GED test starting January 1, 2014. The Workforce Development staff has been working with Caterpillar to implement the On-the-Job Training (OJT) 50% wage reimbursement program for an initial training period.

GEORGIA ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE AUTHORITY (GEFA) UPDATE

The next item on the agenda was a report on the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) by Andrew Szwak, Land Conservation Program Manager. He provided information about GEFA's operational programs and advised that GEFA has supported over 30 projects in the NEGRC region for water, sewer, and solid waste infrastructure improvements over the years. The agency serves as the lead for the state's energy programs. This program funds projects such as landfill gas reclamation, wind and biomass, and energy management systems and controls. One of the projects Mr. Szwak highlighted was GEFA's funding to Newton County for solar-powered water circulators known as "SolarBees" to improve operations of an existing reservoir. He also mentioned smaller GEFA programs that can assist local governments such as the brownfields program. In conclusion, Mr. Szwak emphasized that GEFA is available to assist NEGRC communities in their infrastructure efforts.

OTHER BUSINESS

Since Mr. Turner was absent in August, Chairman Little asked him to come forward and be sworn in as Vice Chairman of the Council.

The next meeting will be held on November 21st.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck
Executive Assistant