



Date: August 17, 2023

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Trumps Catering

Minutes

Members Present:

Linda Blechinger
Ronnie Boggs
Tom Crow
John Daniell
David Dyer
Dodd Ferrelle
Cary Fordyce
Pat Graham
Daniel Graves
Serra Hall
Doug Haynie
Todd Higdon
Tommie Jennings
Don Jernigan
Terry Lawler
Dee Lindsey
Blake McCormack
Wendell McNeal
Bill Palmer
Fred Perriman
Joel Seymour
Jim Shaw
Shane Short
Amy Stone
William Trimier
Brad Tucker

Members Absent:

Louise Adams
Marcello Banes
Phil Brock
Micheal Coile
Kelly Girtz
Steve Horton
John Howard
Jesse Johnson
Janet Jones
Byron Lombard
Jay Paul
Billy Pittard
Flemie Pitts
Roy Roberts
Craig Snow
David Thompson
Lee Vaughn

Guests Present:

Wendy Bond, Winterville
Katrina Cochran, Senator Warnock
Mike Collins, Congressman GA-10
Beth Eavenson, DCA
Jack Eisenman, Winterville Cultural Center
Kevin Mason, Collins GA-10
Greg Ziesenhene, Collins GA-10

Staff Present:

Amber Bailey
Julie Ball
Mark Beatty
Carol Cofer
Sophia Primer
Megan Vogt
Burke Walker

Call to Order

Chairperson Linda Blechinger called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. She welcomed attendees to the August Council meeting and asked everyone to rise and join her in the Pledge of Allegiance. She introduced U.S. Representative Mike Collins, who represents Georgia's 10th District in Washington. Representative Collins came forward to say a few words. Chairperson Blechinger thanked him for spending time with our Council today.



Chairperson Blechinger said the June 15, 2023 minutes were distributed prior to today's meeting. She asked for a motion to approve the minutes unless there were corrections or changes. A motion was made by Tommie Jennings and seconded by Jim Shaw. The motion passed unanimously.

Items of Local Interest

Chairperson Blechinger announced that four counties would report on "items of local interest." These include Barrow, Clarke, Elbert, and Greene Counties. She invited the County Representatives to provide their reports.

Barrow County – Chairman Pat Graham

There is still a high demand for new housing in the County.

- Existing home sales have slowed due to rising interest rates, keeping the new-home construction high.
- Barrow County is expanding its water and wastewater infrastructure. The County recently completed a \$36M in Bond issuance. They issued tax-exempt bonds at a rate of 3.59% and have infrastructure projects planned across the County.
- The County completed a Comprehensive Plan Update.
- An update of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan was recently completed. It was done in conjunction with the Atlanta MPO.
- The County has been working with its cities to approve an IGA for T-SPLOST. Five of the six cities have approved it. The 6th city meets tonight. The Board of Commissioners will consider placing a T-SPLOST referendum on the ballot in November.

Clarke County – Mayor Dodd Ferrelle for Mayor Kelly Girtz

- ACC has been active in Youth Development Space with an intergovernmental agreement with the school district to provide a more thorough set of programs. They are also collaborating with the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce to build a stronger Workforce Development Pipeline.
- The City of Winterville just celebrated its charter day, and it will become an annual event involving local civic organizations. Winterville was chartered on August 15, 1904.
- A \$2 million project is underway with ACC to address flooding on Main Street and should be completed in 2024.
- With the assistance of the NEGRC and the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Blacksmith Shop will apply for a grant to renovate and become a meeting space for the Marigold Collective.
- The Winterville Community Center is undergoing renovations and will be restored to its 1956 appearance. This space will house the art gallery and heritage museum.



- The position of Mayor and 3 Council seats will be on the ballot for the upcoming election.

Elbert County – Bill Palmer for Chairman Lee Vaughn

- Property taxes have risen due to the county-wide tax evaluations.
- The new County budget increased by \$631,000 from last year, and the projected income increase is \$2 million.
- Due to the property tax increase, the Board of Education had to raise the millage rate to continue receiving a \$2.6 million State Equalization Grant.
- The County has started a large paving and resurfacing project using TSPLOST funds.
- Two additional loft apartments have been completed in downtown Elberton. There are now six loft apartments downtown.
- Permits have been completed, and bids are now being received to construct a spec building in the industrial park.
- A splash pad is under construction and should be completed in 2024.

Greene County – Terry Lawler

- The City of Woodville recently received a \$200,000 check to assist with their local match portion for the construction of the Firefly Trail. When construction is completed later this summer, Greene County, Woodville, and Union Point will host a 6.5-mile section of the Firefly Trail, the longest continuous section.
- The Greene County Board of Education recently held the groundbreaking for the new \$39.4 million Greene County Elementary School. The new 113,000-square-foot facility is expected to educate about 900 students when it opens in 2025.
- The county commissioners adopted a 2023-2028 Comprehensive Plan Update in June.
- The Board also received background information that the Zoning Ordinance needed to be updated in light of the substantial changes undertaken and approved as part of the Comprehensive Plan and Future Development Map adoption. A new zoning code was adopted in July to reflect those changes.
- The Greene County Building & Zoning Office was named the Local Issuing Authority of the Year by the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission.
- The Government Finance Officers Association has again recognized the County and its staff by awarding Greene County the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting.
- Thanks to sponsorships by NEGRC's WIOA Division, employers were able to host four educator externships over the summer at A2B Fulfillment, BSP Boiler & Steam Performance, Westlake Pipes and Fitting and St. Mary's Good Samaritan Hospital.
- Greene County continues to grow dramatically due to new residents. According to the US Census Bureau, Greene County has the 10th fastest percentage population growth rate in the State. Greene County's net property tax digest value increased by 25.3% from 2022 to 2023, indicating rapid growth. As a note of interest, 5 of the top ten growth counties, by population percentage, are NEGRC counties.



Committee Reports

Audit & Finance – Mayor Fred Perriman

Mayor Perriman said the Audit & Finance Committee members met earlier today and reviewed several items. Two items require Council action today.

The first item was the review of the June 2023 financial statements that reported revenues in excess of expenditures by \$310,246.84. These statements are unaudited and subject to change pending the final FY23 NEGRC audit. Terry Lawler made a motion that the Council accept the report as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Daniel Graves. The motion passed unanimously.

Second, due to the recent enactment of several laws, including the COVID Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, the Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement Act, the Bipartisan American Miners Act of 2019, and several other laws, the NEGRC's 2022 Lincoln 401(k) Plan Document was updated to meet the new retirement savings plan requirements. All changes were minor with no monetary effect. A copy of the amendment is available on the tables. Terry Lawler made a motion that the Council accept the amendments. The motion was seconded by Mayor Daniel Graves. The motion passed unanimously.

Program-of-Work – Mayor Dodd Ferrelle

Mayor Ferrelle said the Program-of-Work Committee met prior to today's Council meeting and reviewed seven project closeouts for the month since our last meeting in June.

The seven (7) project closeouts include the following:

- Oconee County for assistance in developing a Trails Master Plan;
- Oglethorpe County for an update to their Comprehensive Plan;
- The City of Loganville for facilitation of a retreat with the Development Authority;
- The City of Comer for an update to their Comprehensive Plan;
- Greene County for assistance in developing a grant application to the Georgia Historical Society;
- The City of Social Circle for the administration of a Historic Preservation Fund grant;
- The City of Social Circle for updating their Historic District Design Guidelines.

Based on the Committee's review, the Committee recommended approving the project closeouts for the month and for inclusion in the FY24 Program-of-Work. A motion was made by Jim Shaw and seconded by Tommie Jennings. The motion passed unanimously.



Planning and Government Services – Bill Palmer for Mayor John Howard

Mr. Palmer said the Planning & Government Services Committee met this morning and discussed activities occurring around the region.

The federal Southern Crescent Regional Commission hopes to offer Local Development Districts such as the Northeast Georgia region annual programmatic funding through the LDD Capacity Building Program, similar to the Appalachian Regional Commission. This would be a new funding stream focused on supporting economic development initiatives for eight of the southernmost counties in our region. Conversations for that funding will be channeled through Mark Beatty in the PGS Division.

Building – Brad Tucker for Mayor Kelly Girtz

Mr. Tucker said the Building Committee met earlier this week for a work session and again this morning. The Committee has one item that requires Council action.

The Committee reviewed and evaluated firms responding to the published Request for Qualifications (RFQ). As members may recall, this Council approved publishing the RFQ at our May 17th meeting. We received six qualifications from responding architectural firms to perform a Preliminary Architectural Report (PAR) of the headquarters' building. The PAR is needed to identify potential design solutions and options for improving the Regional Commission's offices through renovation, new construction, or a combination of these.

Based on the Committee's review and the Committee's evaluation, we recommend the selection of Goodwyn/Mills/Cawood to perform these required architectural services. A motion was made by Shane Short and seconded by Mayor Daniel Graves. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Tucker said the commission staff will contact the selected firm, inform non-selected firms of their decision, and begin the PAR. Going forward, our Committee will oversee and participate in the development of the PAR and update the Council on its progress and any required action. The Committee also invites other Council members to participate in this effort.

Executive Director's Report – Burke Walker

Executive Director Burke Walker greeted the Council and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Hiring

Executive Director Walker stated that the NEGRC had successfully recruited and filled four staff vacancies due to resignations and promotions within the three programmatic divisions. These include positions in Aging for Nursing Home Transition Coordinator with Jules Francois and two planner positions with Jody Graichen as Historic Preservation Planner and Adi'a Smith as



Community Planner. Vickie Scotland will join WorkSource Northeast Georgia as the Business Services and Outreach Representative.

Digital Newsletter

Executive Director Walker discussed the transition to a digital newsletter in July. It looks the same but is distributed by email, providing cost savings in printing and postage. The NEGRC has received positive comments about the new format and hopes everyone is receiving the newsletter by email. If not, Julie or Amber can be notified. There has been some internal discussion, and the newsletter will begin a quarterly publication that will contain expanded news and details about programs and opportunities for local governments. This conversion will likely occur in 2024.

Email Hack

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that Julie Ball's email and contact list were both compromised by an unknown entity. Many people received an email with a graphic and link to a "Dropbox Docusend" to open. The NEGRC received calls alerting us to this suspicious email, which was fraudulent. If anyone received that email, please do not open and delete it. We apologize for any inconvenience, and our I.T. has worked to install additional safeguards.

New Members

Executive Director Walker welcomed and recognized several new Council members who are Private Sector appointees. The new Private Sector appointees are Serra Hall (Newton County), William Trimier (Madison), Jesse Johnson (Oglethorpe), and Tommie Jennings (Barrow).

EPA Clean School Bus Funding

Executive Director Walker reminded the Council of the grant-funding opportunity offered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that has an approaching deadline on August 22, 2023. The Clean School Bus program was created through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). It will fund electric, propane, and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses that produce zero or low tailpipe emissions compared to their older diesel predecessors. Information on this opportunity is posted on the NEGRC website.

GARC

Executive Director Walker stated that the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) and its conference committee have been working through the process of planning and programming the annual conference to be held on November 8-10 at the King & Prince on St. Simons. As is customary each year, several Commission staff and Councilmembers will attend. The conference provides a good opportunity for training and networking with the other 11 Regional Commissions and their state and federal partners.

There were no questions or comments, so Executive Director Walker concluded his report.



Presentation

Chairperson Blechinger provided an introduction of Erin Barger, President and CEO of the Foodbank of Northeast Georgia. Ms. Barger provided a presentation on her organization that has, for the past 28 years, worked to distribute food to those in need, including children, families, and senior citizens.

Other Business

Chairperson Blechinger reminded the Council that the next meeting would be September 21, 2023.

Adjournment

With no further business before the Council, Chairperson Blechinger adjourned the meeting at 1:18 p.m.



Julie Ball, Executive Assistant
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

September 21, 2023

Date Approved