
Date: March 18, 2021

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Location: Telephonic

Minutes

Members Present:

Louise Adams
Andy Ainslie
Linda Blechinger
Ronnie Boggs
Joyce Chambers
John Daniell
David Dyer
Dodd Ferrelle
Cary Fordyce
Kelly Girtz
Gail Harrell
Doug Haynie
Bruce Henry
Todd Higdon
Steve Horton
John Howard
Janet Jones
Terry Lawler
Howard Ledford
Bob Padilla
Bill Palmer
Jay Paul
Billy Pittard
Roy Roberts
Jim Shaw

Members Absent:

Marcello Banes
David Bentley
Rick Berry
Jody Blackmon
Phil Brock
Tom Crow
Pat Graham
Larry Guest
Harold Horton
Tate O'Rouke
Fred Perriman
Flemie Pitts
Bill Ritter
Joel Seymour
Jeffrey Smith
Solomon Smothers
David Thompson
Brad Tucker
Frank Turner
Lee Vaughn

Guests Present:

Brandon Ashley
Kristen Miller

Employees Present

Amber Bailey
Julie Ball
Eva Kennedy
Alicia Page

Call to Order

Chairman Pittard called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. Chairman Pittard welcomed everyone to the March meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission. He then asked Julie Ball to take a roll call for those not already identified on the call. Chairman Pittard asked that any guests present announce themselves. Kristen Miller from the Department of Economic Development and Brandon Ashley from Jackson EMC introduced themselves. Chairman Pittard said the February 18, 2021 minutes were distributed prior to today's meeting. Unless there were



corrections or changes, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was made by Mayor Linda Blechinger and seconded by Mayor Gail Harrell. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Pittard noted that in the interest of time “Area Reports” would not be presented by county chairpersons. He asked that any news or important information could be shared at this time. Mayor Dodd Ferrelle shared with the Council that the City of Winterville would create a new “pocket park” constructed in memory of George Chandler. The groundbreaking will be held on March 24, 2021. A dedication ceremony will be held later in the year once work on the park is completed. Mayor John Howard discussed how impressive the “Be Pro Be Proud” trailer in Walton County was and encouraged Council members to visit it. Chairman Bruce Henry of Jasper County stated that a special election was held to fill the seat of the late Carl Pennamon. Sheila Jones won the election to represent District 1. Chairman Todd Higdon informed the Council of a webinar being held for the American Rescue Plan Act. Information regarding usage of the funds would be covered in the webinar.

Chairman Pittard stated that four of the Council’s Committees met prior to this morning’s Council meeting and asked the committee chairpersons to present their reports.

Committee Reports

Audit & Finance – Howard Ledford

Howard Ledford said members of the Audit & Finance Committee met prior to today’s Council meeting and he reported on the following:

January 2021 Financials

Committee members reviewed the financial statements for the six-month period ending January 31, 2021. Revenues exceeded expenditures by \$83,474.47. Financial activity for the six-month period should be at approximately 42% of our remaining FY2021 Budget projections overall.

Howard Ledford made a motion to accept the financial report dated January 31, 2021. The motion was seconded by Ronnie Boggs. The motion passed unanimously.

P.O. Approvals in Excess of \$5,000

Howard Ledford also reported that Alicia Page, NEGRC Comptroller, informed the committee of four purchase orders that were approved by the Audit and Finance Committee Chairman prior to today’s meeting. They are as follows:

- Drivetech – In the amount of \$8,160. The purchase order is for converting 85 Fluorescent light fixtures to LED in the older half of the headquarter’s building.
- Three of the P.O.s are for our Aging division. The Department of Human Services allows the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to give rewards to the providers for doing a good job during the year. Rewards for exceptional performance are determined by



the AAA based on the results of periodic and annual monitoring and evaluation. The AAA has worked with our provider network to establish reward initiatives that are both meaningful and tangible by allowing them to select the items they need for their individual Senior Centers. The three POs that follow apply to the rewards recipients:

- Greene County Senior Center - In the amount of \$10,128.44 for the purchase of kitchen items for their Senior Center (from Manning Brothers).
- Jackson County Senior Center – In the amount of \$12,448.45 for reimbursement of items purchased for their senior center.
- Oconee County Senior Center – In the amount of \$6,678.27 for reimbursement of items purchased for their senior center.

Program-of-Work – Mayor Dodd Ferrelle

Mayor Ferrelle stated that the Program-of-Work Committee met prior to today’s Council meeting and reviewed three (3) technical-assistance requests. These requests, for the Regional Commission’s Planning & Government Services staff, include the following:

- The City of Monticello requested assistance in the preparation of a “Complete Streets and Trail Plan.” This assistance includes facilitation of input sessions, assessment of current infrastructure, and identification of improvement projects. The fee for this assistance is \$1,000 that is also supported by the NEGRC’s GDOT Bike and Pedestrian planning grant.
- The City of Covington submitted two (2) requests for assistance: The first is to assist in the review and amendment to sections of the City’s current zoning code. The fee for this assistance is \$2,000 that is also supported through the NEGRC’s Planning contract through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The second is for assistance in developing an OneGeorgia grant application for water-system improvements to serve an industrial site. The fee for this assistance is \$2,000.

Based on a recommendation by the Executive Director followed by the Committee’s review, the Committee recommended approving these three (3) requests for inclusion in the FY2021 program-of-work effective today, March 18, 2021. A motion was made by Mayor Dodd Ferrelle and seconded by David Dyer. The motion passed unanimously.

Note: Mayor Steve Horton recused himself from the vote.

Planning and Government Services – Commissioner Andy Ainslie

Commissioner Andy Ainslie stated that the PGS Committee met on March 17, 2021 and discussed economic development and other news from around the region.

During the meeting, the PGS Committee, which also serves as the CEDS Committee, performed an annual review of the Northeast Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy’s Action Plan. The review included discussion of accomplishments, active projects, and needs and goals for the next year. The NEGRC maintains the CEDS as part of its duties as an Economic Development District, through the U.S. Economic Development Administration.



The PGS Committee had one item that requires Council action: DCA recently approved the Northeast Georgia Regional Plan Implementation Program Annual Report. The PGS Committee recommended adoption of the Annual Report by the Council. Commissioner Ainslie offered to read the resolution, if necessary.

A motion was made by Commissioner Andy Ainslie to adopt the Annual Report. The motion was seconded by Mayor John Howard. The motion passed unanimously.

This Implementation Program Annual Report, as adopted, will continue to guide the Commission's planning efforts.

Personnel – Mayor Doug Haynie

Mayor Haynie stated that the Personnel Committee met prior to today's Council meeting and discussed several items, none of which, however, required Council action.

- The Committee was provided an update from Director Walker on several staff-related items and information about his review of staff performances for the year. These reviews are on schedule to be completed by the end of this month.
- The Committee also outlined their timeline for conducting Director Walker's annual review that will take place next month. Following this review in April, the Committee will complete their evaluation in May to present at the June Council meeting. Their results and recommendation, at that time, will require approval of this body.

Executive Director's Report – Burke Walker

Executive Director Burke Walker greeted the Council and stated that there were no action items this month.

Atrium

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that he was exploring options to update the Atrium meeting space with audio and video equipment. The Atrium was designed as a large meeting space originally and Executive Director Walker has met with the original architects, Carter & Watkins, to specify and seek proposals for the audio/video equipment. The Workforce Board and Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority have used the Atrium meeting space and the upgrade would be beneficial as the NEGRRC returns to in-person meetings.



New Councilmember Orientation

A new councilmember orientation will be held in April or May from 10am-12pm. This event will be an opportunity for new council members to learn more about the Regional Commission and to assist in general onboarding. Executive Assistant Julie Ball will contact new councilmembers with further details.

ARC Leadership Institute

Executive Director Walker discussed the Leadership Institute for economic development training held by The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) for current and emerging leaders (about 40 each year). This is the third year the program has been held and is an extensive nine-month program focused on skill-building, seminars, best practice reviews, mentoring and networking. The curriculum includes six multi-day seminars followed by a capstone graduation. Cost for the training and travel are underwritten by ARC. This program is competitive and an application must be submitted by May 1, 2021. Applicants will participate in programs from October through July. Prospective candidates seeking more information may visit the website www.arc.gov/leadership or contact PGS Director Eva Kennedy. This is an opportunity for existing or emerging leaders involved in economic development within the four ARC counties.

DCA

Executive Director Walker informed the Council of the retirement of Joanie Perry. She retired from DCA in Feb 2021 after many years of service and as Director of Community Finance Programs. Kim Carter who has worked extensively as Director of the Office of Community Development with DCA has been promoted to fill the position.

\$1.9 Trillion COVID Recovery Relief Bill

Executive Director Walker shared information with the Council that he had received from the GARC's contact on Georgia's counties' totals for funding. The county allocations ranged from \$2.76 million to \$24.89 million in the region. In addition to this amount, metro cities received additional amounts (e.g. ACC \$35.15M as announced previously by Mayor Girtz). The total for the state is \$2.71 billion and \$160.6 million for Northeast Georgia. A spreadsheet was created with the Georgia numbers and any local governments can get this information by contacting Julie Ball at jball@negrc.org.

Governor Kemp announced that he was directing COVID funding for two transportation projects in this region: one to Barrow County for Hwy 211 expansion from 2 to 4 lanes and the Monticello bypass. Construction cost is \$12 and \$19 million respectively for the 2 projects.



DNR Ga Outdoor Stewardship Program

Executive Director Walker stated that the DNR recently announced the results of its Outdoor Stewardship Program and nine recipients of potential grant funding. Greene County was one of the preliminary awardees in partnership with the cities of Maxeys, Woodville, and Union Point in the amount of \$2,109,375. The award would be used to complete almost 7 miles of the 39-mile Firefly Trail that extends through three counties in Northeast Georgia from Athens to Union Point. This award advances the application to the second and final level of review. The grant application was prepared by John Devine and he or PGS Director Eva Kennedy may be contacted with any questions.

Executive Director Walker asked if the Council had any questions. There were none and he concluded his report.

Mayor Linda Blechinger offered her help to cities with the GMA website. Howard Ledford offered his observation on how nice the Firefly Trail is in Winterville.

Presentation

Chairman Pittard stated that since holding virtual meetings, we typically have not included speakers in the interest of time. He then provided an introduction to Mr. Brandon Ashley, Business Development Manager, for Jackson EMC who provided a brief overview of activities in Northeast Georgia. Brandon, as a Business Development Manager at Jackson EMC, performs external affairs responsibilities in Barrow, Clarke, and Madison Counties. In his role, Brandon primarily assists local and state economic-development efforts in helping bring new jobs to the region and help retain existing industries. Brandon is a 2007 graduate from the University of Georgia with an undergraduate degree in Agricultural Communications, and a 2020 graduate of Brenau University with his MBA. Mr. Ashley then proceeded with his presentation.

Other Business

Chairman Pittard said that each year this month, the appointment of a NEGRC Awards Committee is made. The Committee is charged with nominating and selecting two individuals for two separate awards. The first is the "Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian" award. The second award is the "Northeast Georgia Local Government Administrator of the Year" award.

This year, he asked the following Councilmembers to serve on the Awards Committee: John Daniell (Committee Chairman), Dodd Ferrelle, and Bill Palmer. The work of this committee and the recipients of these awards will be presented at our May meeting. He also invited all Councilmembers to reach out to Chairman Daniell to provide names of potential nominees.

There was no other business to report.



Adjournment

Chairman Pittard thanked everyone for their attendance and with no further business to come before the Council, he adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m. He noted the next Council meeting is on April 15, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Julie Ball

Julie Ball, Executive Assistant
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

April 15, 2021

Date Approved