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Date: February 17, 2022

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Trumps Catering

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## Minutes

### Members Present:

Andy Ainslie  
Marcello Banes  
Linda Blechinger  
Ronnie Boggs  
John Daniell  
David Dyer  
Dodd Ferrelle  
Cary Fordyce  
Kelly Girtz  
Daniel Graves  
Gail Harrell  
Bruce Henry  
Todd Higdon  
John Howard  
Terry Lawler  
Byron Lombard  
Ralph Maxwell  
Bill Palmer  
Fred Perriman  
Joel Seymour  
Shane Short  
Craig Snow  
Brad Tucker  
Lee Vaughn  
Paul Walton

### Members Absent:

Louise Adams  
Phil Brock  
Tom Crow  
Pat Graham  
Doug Haynie  
Harold Horton  
Steve Horton  
Janet Jones  
Jill Parham  
Jay Paul  
Flemie Pitts  
Bill Ritter  
Roy Roberts  
Jim Shaw  
Solomon Smothers  
Jennifer Stewart  
David Thompson  
Frank Turner

### Guests Present:

Wendy Bond, City of Winterville  
Mark Elliott, Jody Hice, GA-10  
Don Jernigan, Jasper County  
Bruce Johnson, Winterville Council  
Sheila Jones, Jasper County  
Stephanie Lindsey, Newton County  
Tracy Massey, Arnoldsville Council  
Cheryl Smith, Georgia Dept. of Agriculture

### Staff Present:

Amber Bailey  
Julie Ball  
Carol Cofer  
Eva Kennedy  
Sophia Primer  
Burke Walker

### Call to Order

Chairperson Bill Palmer called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed attendees to the February Council meeting and asked everyone to rise and join him in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then asked any guests or visitors to introduce themselves. Chairperson Palmer said the January 20, 2022 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 Cary Fordyce and seconded by Billy Pittard. The motion carried unanimously.



## **Items of Local Interest**

Chairperson Bill Palmer announced that, today, four counties would report on “Items of Local Interest.” These included Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton. He invited the county representatives to provide their reports.

### **Newton County – Chairman Marcello Banes**

- The new Assent Element Green Battery recycling company has made an investment of \$75 million that would create 150 jobs in Walton County.
- Newton, Walton, Jasper and Morgan will hold a regional job fair on April 12.
- Three Ring Studios will spend \$150 million to expand their facility by 500,000 square feet. They will become the largest production company in Georgia.

### **Oconee County – Chairman John Daniell**

- An expansion of the sewer plan from 1.5 million gallons a day (MGD) to 3 MGD is in the design phase.
- Oconee County is working with the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority (UOBWA) to expand the Bear Creek Water Treatment Facility.
- Oconee County is exploring options with Walton County to build a water treatment facility at Hard Labor Creek Reservoir.
- Construction is underway to widen Experiment Station Road from Butler’s Crossing to the Highway 411 bridge. This project will last approximately two years.
- Highway 316 will be under construction in Oconee County from 2024-2027.
- Oconee County is under contract with Charter Communications for broadband. Oconee County will pay Charter \$1,000 dollars per connection and an additional \$200 dollars for every connection completed in 2022. The process will take 2 years and Oconee County hopes to reach 98% of the customers without broadband.
- Costco is expected to open in July 2022 and the Varsity restaurant should open by the end of 2022.

### **Oglethorpe County – Ralph Maxwell**

- Oglethorpe County was disappointed to learn it would not be a recipient of federal and state funds that would have been used to build broadband infrastructure in rural areas. Several members of the Economic Development Authority and the Board of Commissioners are working to rectify any shortcomings that can be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan.
- A subsidiary of Con Ed had their bid approved to provide solar energy to Georgia Power. Con Ed leased 1,325 acres for 35 years in the Goosepond District of Oglethorpe County. The solar panels will be mounted on 1,200 acres of the property and approximately 100 acres will serve as a buffer zone. The property taxes collected over the 35 year lease will provide millions of dollars to the county and the school



system. An estimated \$500,000 of the taxes collected will go to the Economic Development Authority (EDA).

- The school system proposed the construction of a new combined school complex and would tear down the pre-integration school constructed in 1955. The new school complex would be built using state and SPLOST funding if approved in a referendum.
- The Oglethorpe Echo was recently donated to a non-profit corporation which contracted with the University of Georgia's Grady School of Journalism. The paper will be used to give journalism students real-life experience in community journalism. Dink NeSmith, a resident of Oglethorpe County, created the plan and has been heavily involved in the newspaper business for 50 years.

### **Walton County – Shane Short**

- Shane Short informed the Council of their search for a County Manager.
- A new Publix opened in Monroe and had the second-highest reported opening day with sales of \$175,000. A Planet Fitness, Marshall's, Ross and Chicken Salad Chick will also be opening in the area.
- A bond has been secured for a new jail. The project will cost \$130 million and construction should begin in the fall of 2022. Walton County is in the process of acquiring more land adjacent to the courthouse for the jail.
- Walton is exploring options with Oconee County to build a water treatment facility at Hard Labor Creek Reservoir. The project will cost approximately \$125 million.
- The Joint Development Authority (JDA) is excited about Rivian coming to the area. Rivian announced an investment of \$5 billion and the project will create 7,500 new jobs.
- The pilot payment process for companies (payment in lieu of taxes) is being formalized. Approximately \$1 billion dollars in revenue will be generated.
- A recruiting effort has been made to bring in more jobs in hi-tech and pharmaceutical industries. This will allow individuals without a four year degree to have a successful career with on-the-job training. Rivian is one of the companies that will provide such jobs. They will produce approximately 400,000 electric vehicles a year. Walton County's citizens will benefit from these job opportunities as well as citizens of the surrounding areas.



## **Committee Reports**

### **Audit & Finance – Mayor Fred Perriman**

Mayor Perriman said members of the Audit & Finance Committee met prior to today's Council meeting.

#### December 2021 Financials

Sophia Primer, the NEGRC's Comptroller, reviewed the financial statements for the six-month period ending December 31, 2021 with the Committee. Revenues exceeded expenditures by \$78,383.99.

Mayor Perriman made motions to accept the financial report dated December 31, 2021. The motions passed unanimously.

### **Program of Work Committee – Mayor Dodd Ferrelle**

Prior to today's Council meeting, the Program-of-Work Committee reviewed four technical-assistance requests for the month. These include the following:

- The City of Winterville requested assistance in preparing a Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) grant application seeking financial assistance in developing a Historic Structure's Report for the historic blacksmith shop. If awarded, grant administration is also requested by the City with a fee of \$1,000.
- The City of Covington requested assistance in the grant administration of their Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) award. The fee for this assistance is 5% of the grant award.
- The City of Winterville requested assistance in preparing an update to the City's comprehensive plan and to include additional plan elements. The fee for this assistance is \$4,500.
- The City of Pendergrass requested assistance in preparing an update to the City's comprehensive plan and to include additional plan elements. The fee for this assistance is \$1,500.

Based on recommendations by the Executive Director followed by the Committee's review, Mayor Ferrelle recommended approving the four technical assistance requests for inclusion in the NEGRC's FY2022 Program-of-Work in the form of motions. The motions passed unanimously.

### **Planning and Government Services – Commissioner Andy Ainslie**

Commissioner Ainslie said the Planning & Government Services Committee met this morning and discussed economic and community development activities occurring around the region.



The first Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee Meeting is scheduled for March 10th at 10:00 a.m. at the Regional Commission. Each County Chair should have identified two representatives to serve on the committee. If they haven't, he suggested they send that information to Eva Kennedy as soon as possible.

Commissioner Ainslie had one item for Council consideration. The PGS Committee considered a proposal to expand the operating territory of the Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission's U.S. Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Funds to cover the 12-county Northeast Georgia Region as well. RLFs offer loan opportunities for small businesses. The NEGRC does not currently operate any RLFs. A resolution supporting this expansion was circulated to members prior the Council meeting. In addition, the PGS Committee reviewed the proposed resolution at their meeting and made motions for Council adoption. The motions passed unanimously.

### **Executive Director's Report – Burke Walker**

Executive Director Burke Walker greeted the Council and informed the Council that two items in his report would require action.

#### **New Mayors**

Executive Director Walker welcomed two new Councilmembers. Mayor Daniel Graves (Elberton) and Mayor Craig Snow (Lexington). He also recognized Mayor Pro Tem Ronnie Boggs (Lexington), attending with Mayor Snow and as a former NEGRC Councilmember.

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that he would represent the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions at the resource table provided at Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) newly-elected officials' orientation in partnership with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

#### **HB 1180**

Executive Director Walker made mention of past meetings of the Georgia Rural Development Council that comprises several members of the Georgia House of Representatives. The Rural Development Council, in past years, also considered Regional Commission membership and, again this session, is considering Regional Commission composition in House Bill 1180 (Walker read a summary of the bill). In this year's bill, changes are proposed for non-public, gubernatorial appointees. As reported at the last Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) meeting, Terry Matthews, GARC legislative liaison, reminded members the proposed changes would ultimately come under consideration by the Governor. Terry Matthews continues to have conversations with Rep. Corbett, who introduced the bill, and an update will be given on any progress of this proposed legislation.



### **Phone System**

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that a new phone system would be installed in March at NEGRC offices. The same vendor for the old phone system will be used and the phone numbers will remain the same. A new feature will allow callers to connect to staff directly and staff can connect remotely using a cell phone application or a computer. Callers will notice a slight difference but the new phone system should be much more effective and time-saving.

### **Annual Performance Appraisals**

Executive Director Walker stated that the NEGRC would be conducting the annual performance appraisals of the staff over the following weeks. Division Directors will evaluate individual staff performances over the year and conduct individual interviews. Executive Director Walker will review the appraisals and consider any merit increases to recommend to the Personnel Committee at the April meeting. From there, the FY 2023 budget will be developed with Sophia's (NEGRC Comptroller) assistance and through the Audit & Finance Committee for the Council's approval at the June meeting. The Executive Director's review, as required by state law, will be conducted by the Personnel committee in April and also presented to the Council in June.

### **CVIQG Salary Compensation Study**

Executive Director Walker stated that the study being conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government was nearing completion and would be presented to the Personnel Committee in April. Executive Director Walker is working closely with Mayor Doug Haynie to keep him apprised of the study's progress.

### **Aging**

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that Marylea Boatwright Quinn, the current Government Affairs Director for the Alzheimer's Association was named as the new Aging Division Director at DHS-DAS.

Executive Director Walker updated the Council on the progress of work done last year to coordinate with member county governments to match ARPA funds for AAA state funding. The House included the state match in the Amended FY22 budget for \$1.5 million. It will go to the Senate for their consideration. If approved, it will clear the way for approximately \$2 million in additional funding for senior services [e.g., telephone outreach, congregate and home-delivered meals] in Northeast Georgia and its counties. He thanked Michele Kelley, AAA Deputy Director, who worked with member counties in securing commitments for the match.



Executive Director Walker stated that each year the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) required the adoption of a resolution that commits the AAA Division of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission to providing aging services to the region. The resolution must be adopted by the Council and was previously circulated with meeting information. Executive Director Walker stated that it would be appropriate for the Council to consider a motion to adopt the DHS resolution as presented to the membership. Chairperson Bill Palmer motioned to adopt the DHS resolution and Dodd Ferrelle seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Director Walker informed the Council of a resolution that was not previously circulated, due to its receipt earlier today. This resolution allows the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission to enter into a contract with the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) to receive funding from July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023 that increases access to services during the COVID pandemic. Chairperson Bill Palmer motioned to adopt the DHS resolution and Linda Blechinger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

As there were no questions or comments, Executive Director Walker concluded his report.

### **Other Business**

Chairperson Palmer reminded everyone of the next meeting on March 17, 2022 at Trumps.

### **Adjournment**

Chairperson Palmer thanked everyone for their attendance and with no further business to come before the Council, he adjourned the meeting at 1:08 p.m.

  
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Julie Ball, Executive Assistant  
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

March 17, 2022  
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Date Approved