



Date: March 16, 2023

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Trumps Catering

Minutes

Members Present:

Linda Blechinger
Ronnie Boggs
Michael Coile
Dodd Ferrelle
Cary Fordyce
Kelly Girtz
Daniel Graves
Doug Haynie
Todd Higdon
John Howard
Terry Lawler
Blake McCormack
Wendell McNeal
Bill Palmer
Jay Paul
Fred Perriman
Billy Pittard
Joel Seymour
Jim Shaw
Shane Short
Brad Tucker

Members Absent:

Louise Adams
Marcello Banes
Phil Brock
Tom Crow
John Daniell
David Dyer
Pat Graham
Steve Horton
Don Jernigan
Janet Jones
Byron Lombard
Jill Parham
Flemie Pitts
Bill Ritter
Roy Roberts
Craig Snow
Amy Stone
David Thompson
Frank Turner
Lee Vaughn

Guests Present:

Wendy Bond, Winterville
Marty Clark, Jackson County BOC
Allen Hulme, Elbert County
T.J. Sisk, Auburn
Carol Williams, Workforce Dev. Board

Staff Present:

Amber Bailey
Julie Ball
Mark Beatty
Carol Cofer
Jon McBrayer
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 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 February 16, 2023 minutes were distributed prior to today's meeting. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes. A motion was made by Mayor Linda Blechinger and seconded by Mayor Fred Perriman. The motion carried unanimously.



Items of Local Interest

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

Barrow County – Billy Pittard for Chairman Pat Graham

- A Development of Regional Impact review was recently completed. The design and permitting phase is now underway to expand the Barber Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant by 1 million gallons per day. Designs and partial funding for the Tanners Bridge Wastewater Treatment Plant have also recently been approved.
- Along with Jackson, Oconee, and Clarke counties, the Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority is excited about expanding the water treatment facility from 21 million gallons to 42 million gallons per day.
- Barrow County has a lengthy list of water and wastewater projects underway. They continuously evaluate the economy and its potential impact on utility project expansions and scheduling.
- There has been an increase in the number of economic development prospects looking at sites in the county.
- Spring Mountain Center was the first company to move into the industrial park. The first building is 250,000 square feet, and they will continue to expand with a second 500,000 square foot building.
- US Lumber has a facility under construction and will be moving its operation from Alabama to Barrow County. They purchased a 73-acre site on the CSX rail line. They are scheduled to be in their 600,000-square-foot building by late August.
- The Comprehensive Transportation Plan should be finalized by June. Identifying projects and their need for a funding mechanism should lead to pursuing a TSPLOST this fall.
- Building permit activity remains very high.
- Sales tax revenues remain strong with a monthly increase of 14-16% over prior years.
- Kevin Little has resigned as County Manager, and Billy Pittard will serve as Interim County Manager.

Clarke County- Mayor Kelly Girtz

- The redevelopment plan for the Georgia Square Mall property has been approved. It's a 75-acre property that will house 1,000 apartments, 200 townhomes, 80,000 square feet of office space, and 20 acres of outdoor gathering space with walking trails.
- The first phase of Athens Studios in Winterville has been completed. This property includes a 40,000-square-foot sound stage, two 20,000-square-foot sound stages, and a 100,000-square-foot swing building. Plans for three more studio spaces are in development.
- A ribbon cutting for the Firefly Trail will be held in April.
- The Land Use Component of the Comprehensive Plan is being updated.



Elbert County – Allen Hulme for Chairman Lee Vaughn

- A new Fire Department is being built, and the county is transitioning to full-time firefighters. There are currently four full-time firefighters and two that will graduate soon.
- Another TSPLOST will be on the ballot this fall.
- A new \$2 million, 14,000-square-foot 4-H building will be built, and construction should begin this summer.

Greene County – Terry Lawler for Commissioner Dee Lindsey

- The Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution advocating for improved State oversight and more ability to have local enforcement and regulation over the practice of disposing industrial by-products and food-processing residuals on pastureland in rural areas.
- Greene County Single Family Home Sales in 2022 were another banner year. The average sales price for single-family homes for all of Greene County in 2022 was \$1,054,269, a 12% increase over the average 2021 price. For those interested in purchasing a home on Lake Oconee, the average price in 2022 was \$2,040,373, an 18% increase over 2021. And for those of you who aren't ready to move to the lake yet but want to buy a lot, last year's highest-selling lot was a 4.05-acre piece that sold for \$5 million.
- A DRI for 600 acres of agricultural land has been rezoned to PUD for approximately 1400 homes to be developed by the Kolter Group, similar to Twin Lakes in Hoschton.
- Efforts have begun to establish a CID on commercial property east of Lake Oconee Parkway immediately south of exit 130 on I-20. Multiple new restaurants, a gas station, and another hotel are planned, and the property owners want to take advantage of CID's benefits.
- Greene County and our five cities agreed on distributing LOST funds for 2023-2032.
- Athens Technical College will be moving from its present location and has partnered with the Board of Education at the College and Career Academy within Greene County High School.

Committee Reports

Audit & Finance – Mayor Fred Perriman

Mayor Perriman said one Audit & Finance Committee item required Council action today.

The Committee reviewed the January 2023 financial statements for the 7th month of the fiscal year that reported revenues in-excess of expenditures by \$207,489.65. The expenditures fall in line with the adopted budget, with 42% remaining to spend.

As presented, Mayor Perriman made motions to accept the January 2023 financial reports. The motions passed unanimously.



Program of Work Committee – Mayor Dodd Ferrelle

The Program-of-Work Committee met prior to today's Council meeting to review five technical-assistance requests for the month. These require Council action.

- The Town of Newborn requested assistance developing an update to their comprehensive plan. There is no fee for this assistance.
- Madison County requested assistance developing two Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) applications to Senators Ossoff and Warnock's offices. These applications seek funding for three projects: A Senior Active Living Center, an Agricultural Center, and water-infrastructure improvements. There is no fee for this assistance.
- The Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority requested assistance developing a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) application to Senator Ossoff. There is no fee for this assistance.
- Elbert County requested staff assistance in facilitating a retreat of the Board of Commissioners. There is no fee for this assistance.
- Madison County requested assistance in developing a grant application to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The application seeks funding to support the analysis of water and sewer infrastructure. There is no fee for this assistance.

Five (5) project closeouts for the month were completed, and projects officially closed for the following:

- The City of Oxford for updating their comprehensive plan.
- The City of Oxford for completing a grant application for the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program.
- The City of Winder for developing a Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) grant application.
- Oconee County for the administration of a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the Senior Center's expansion; and
- The City of Covington for updating their comprehensive plan.

Based on a recommendation by the Executive Director followed by the Committee's review, the Committee recommends approving these technical-assistance requests and project closeouts for inclusion in the FY2023 program-of-work effective March 16, 2023, in the form of motions. The motions passed unanimously.

Planning and Government Services – Mayor John Howard

The Planning & Government Services Committee reported that the Georgia Department of Transportation had announced additional funding that will be dedicated to a regional transit development plan for the Northeast Georgia region. The plan will focus on the needs and opportunities for public-transit services in all twelve counties. The planning process will take about one year and start in the Summer of 2023.



The PGS Division held the second and final public hearing yesterday, March 15th, for the Regional Plan update. The Regional Plan draft has been presented to the PGS Committee for preliminary review and is ready for transmittal to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) for state review.

As presented, Mayor Howard made motions to approve the transmittal of the Regional Plan to DCA. The motions passed unanimously.

Chairman Palmer announced that the newly-appointed Building Committee would meet today immediately following the adjournment.

Executive Director's Report – Burke Walker

Executive Director Burke Walker greeted the Council and thanked everyone for their attendance. He stated that none of the items covered in his report require Council action.

News

Executive Director Walker said he'd recently met with Governor Kemp's Field Representative, Hunter Spears. He covers four Regional Commissions and lives locally in the area. Executive Director Walker discussed the two Gubernatorial appointees needed to fill vacancies on the Council.

Executive Director Walker welcomed Dee Lyndsey of Greene County as a new member of the Council and stated that Byron Lombard would remain on the Council as an Associate member.

The Division Directors will complete annual performance appraisals for NEGRC staff in March. In addition, Executive Director Walker's annual appraisal will be performed by the Personnel Committee next month, as required by state law.

Executive Director Walker participated in Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) newly-elected officials training at the Georgia Center. He staffed the Georgia Association of Regional Commission's (GARC) booth and informed attendees on how Regional Commissions can assist their cities with a range of services.

Executive Director Walker recently returned from the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) and National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) annual conference in Arlington, VA. For 2024, he expects level funding for Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) support for the NEGRC and the other 73 local development districts across the ARC states. Executive Director Walker was nominated again to serve on the DDAA Board as the Georgia representative for 2023-2024.



Congressionally Directed Spending

Executive Director Walker stated that the Congressional Directed Spending (CDS) applications from Senators Warnock and Ossoff's offices were requested by March 10th and 7th, respectively. The Upper Oconee Basin Water Authority (UOBWA) requested assistance with a CDS application for the Bear Creek Water Treatment Facility's expansion.

House Bill 1385

Executive Director Walker introduced Jon McBrayer, GIS Manager at the NEGRC, to discuss HB 1385. This bill now requires local governments to submit mapping information when undertaking annexations. The law also named Regional Commissions for assisting local governments. To help coordinate this effort state-wide, the GARC sought to develop a system to implement this requirement in coordination with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). Jon McBrayer, along with other Planning and Government Staff, developed an online system to be used across the state and by the 12 Regional Commissions.

Jon McBrayer, NEGRC GIS Manager, provided a demonstration of the GARC Annexation Hub.

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

Other Business

Chairperson Palmer said each year, our Council presents its Robert L. and Betty Williford Distinguished Northeast Georgian and Local Government Administrator of the Year awards at the May meeting. Requests for nominations for these two awards will be distributed to Councilmembers later this month. To assist in the review and selection of nominees and unless there were objections, he appointed an Awards Committee with John Daniell as Chairperson and members Dodd Ferrelle and Terry Lawler. He said to look for an email from Julie with the nomination form and awards criteria in the next week or so for their consideration. He encouraged everyone to nominate individuals worthy of regional recognition this year.

As a final reminder, Chairman Palmer said we would meet Wednesday (not Thursday), April 19, 2023 at noon.

Adjournment

Chairperson Palmer thanked everyone for their attendance, and with no further business to come before the Council, he adjourned the meeting at 1:11 p.m.

Julie Ball, Executive Assistant
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

April 19, 2023

Date Approved