



Date: September 21, 2023

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Trumps Catering

Minutes

Members Present:

Linda Blechinger
Ronnie Boggs
Micheal Coile
John Daniell
Kelly Girtz
Pat Graham
Daniel Graves
Doug Haynie
John Howard
Don Jernigan
Jesse Johnson
Terry Lawler
Blake McCormack
Wendell McNeal
Bill Palmer
Jay Paul
Fred Perriman
Jim Shaw
Brad Tucker

Members Absent:

Louise Adams
Marcello Banes
Phil Brock
Tom Crow
David Dyer
Dodd Ferrelle
Cary Fordyce
Serra Hall
Todd Higdon
Steve Horton
Tommie Jennings
Janet Jones
Dee Lindsey
Byron Lombard
Billy Pittard
Flemie Pitts
Roy Roberts
Joel Seymour
Shane Short
Craig Snow
Amy Stone
David Thompson
William Trimier
Lee Vaughn

Guests Present:

Hannah Barron, Madison County Journal
Freddie Broome, GMA
John Ward, Walton County
Greg Ziesenhene, Collins GA-10

Staff Present:

Amber Bailey
Julie Ball
Mark Beatty
Peggy Jenkins
Sophia Primer
Burke Walker

Call to Order

Chairperson Linda Blechinger called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. She welcomed attendees to the September Council meeting and requested that everyone rise and join her in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. She then invited any guests or visitors to introduce themselves. Greg Ziesenhene provided the group with the latest updates from Congressman Mike Collins' office.

Chairperson Blechinger informed the attendees that the minutes from August 17, 2023, were distributed before today's meeting. She called for a motion to approve the minutes unless there



were any corrections or changes. A motion was made by Jim Shaw and seconded by Ronnie Boggs. The motion passed unanimously.

Items of Local Interest

Chairperson Blechinger announced that four counties would report on "items of local interest." These include Jackson, Jasper, Madison, and Morgan Counties. She invited the County Representatives to provide their reports.

Jackson County – Jim Shaw for Chairman Tom Crow

- The Jackson County Commissioners will roll back the millage rate to the full, rollback rate, making it one of the few taxing entities to do so.
- Jackson County schools experienced a growth of 1,500 students last year and recently opened a new middle school in July. Construction has commenced on a new elementary school.
- Braselton's library expansion is nearing completion, and the town is renovating the historic grist mill.
- Commerce plans to fast-track the construction of a new wastewater treatment facility. The City has been awarded a \$33 million state grant for the new plant, which is estimated to cost \$40 million.
- Jefferson has approved the construction of an aquatic center and will issue bonds to fund it.
- Jackson County recently held a first-call ceremony to celebrate the activation of its new \$21 million public safety radio system.
- More candidates are expected, but currently six candidates have declared they will be running for Sheriff in 2024. Sheriff of the Year, Janice Mangum, is retiring.

Jasper County – Chairman Don Jernigan

- Construction of the new jail is progressing despite a few weather-related delays.
- Progress continues on the construction of the new food bank.
- Building permits are still being issued at a steady rate.
- The school's enrollment numbers continue to grow.
- A new Commissioner, Asher Gray, was elected in a special election.

Madison County – Mayor Mike Coile for Chairman Todd Higden

- The County has rolled back the millage rate to 26.02.
- Ila is collaborating with the NEGRC to secure funding for a new City Hall.
- The City of Ila, along with many local businesses, will hold its 5th annual Christmas Tree lighting on November 26 from 3-7 pm. There will be numerous family activities.

Morgan County – Commissioner Blake McCormack



- A groundbreaking ceremony was recently held for the new recreation complex.
- Morgan County hosted the selection committee for the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) in hopes of being selected.
- The County continues to work on strengthening its relationship with the City of Madison and has recently taken over animal control for the City.
- A state of emergency was declared earlier this month due to 12 inches of rain, which caused damage to some of the bridges and culverts.
- Morgan County received a grant to fund AV upgrades to its superior courtroom.
- The County is actively participating in the Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit Domestic Violence Task Force.
- A new Fire Chief, Garret Smith, will assume the role on October 1.

Committee Reports

Audit & Finance – Mayor Fred Perriman

Mayor Perriman said the Audit & Finance Committee members met earlier today and reviewed one item that requires Council action today.

The Committee reviewed the July 2023 financial statements for the first month of the fiscal year that reported revenues in excess of expenditures by \$65,077.64. The expenditures for this period align with the FY24 budgeted projections with 93% of the budget remaining. Terry Lawler made a motion to accept the report as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Daniel Graves. The motion passed unanimously.

Program-of-Work – Mayor Mike Coile for Dodd Ferrelle

Mayor Coile said the Program-of-Work Committee met prior to today's Council meeting and reviewed two technical-assistance requests and one project closeout for the month.

The two technical-assistance requests for the month include the following:

- The City of Ila requested assistance in developing complete streets and trail plan. There is no fee for this assistance as it is provided by the Commission's Bike & Pedestrian contract with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and local dues.
- The City of Lexington requested assistance in developing a downtown masterplan. The fee for this assistance is \$1,000.

One project closeout for the month was successfully completed and the project officially closed for the following:

- The City of Elberton for updating Design Guidelines for the Historic Preservation Commission.



Based on the Committee's review, the Committee recommended approving the project technical-assistance requests and closeout for the month and for inclusion in the FY24 Program-of-Work. A motion was made by Mayor Kelly Girtz and seconded by Commissioner Blake McCormick. The motion passed unanimously.

Planning and Government Services – Mayor John Howard

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

He also noted that an application for funding for fiscal year 2025 through the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Georgia Department of Transportation 5304 Statewide Planning Program for public transit is due by September 30th. This application requires an authorizing resolution by the NEGRC Council. The total contract amount will be \$106,343.00, made up of 80% in Federal funds, 10% in State funds, and 10% in matching funds from the NEGRC. The Committee recommends approval of the resolution authorizing the Planning and Government Services Division to submit the funding request. A motion was made by Commissioner Blake McCormick and seconded by Mayor Fred Perriman. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Director's Report – Burke Walker

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

Newton County Senior Center

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that he had recently attended the grand opening of the Newton County Senior Center expansion. This is the second expansion, and it's a very impressive facility that will help meet the needs of the growing senior population. It's a great partnership for Northeast Georgia and Newton County in their efforts to increase capacity for our senior citizens.

AAA Advisory Council Membership

Executive Director Walker stated that several of NEGRC's programmatic divisions are guided by Boards or Committees for oversight and deployment of their respective services. Our Aging Division and the services it offers are guided both by an Area Plan and a supporting Advisory Board that meets quarterly. This Board comprises two representatives from each of our twelve counties, one of whom is appointed by each county chairperson. To update the membership and fill vacancies, a request will be sent to select counties to fill any vacancies and appoint a new member next month. Peggy Jenkins is available to answer any questions. Any assistance you may provide in nominating new members would be greatly appreciated.



Rushton and Company

Executive Director Walker discussed the recent FY23 audit conducted by Rushton and Company. No delays are expected and Rushton's audit report is scheduled to be presented later this year, in November, for this Council's review. An adjustment is also expected to be presented at the October Council meeting.

GARC

Executive Director Walker informed the Council about the previous year's effort by GARC to request the restoration of our Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Planning contract funding to its 2010 levels. This request amounts to \$900,000 statewide and affects the 12 regional commissions. Preliminary meetings have been held with Commissioner Nunn of DCA, and further meetings with the Office of Planning & Budget are planned. As we progress in this process, we can provide additional information or a sample letter to support this effort for those interested.

House Rural Development Council

Executive Director Walker noted the recent Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts (DOAA) report from Mr. Greg Griffin, State Auditor, presented in Macon on August 29th at the House Rural Development Council meeting. Mr. Griffin provided a summary of the requirements for cities, counties, development authorities, and regional commissions to submit annual audits. The report identified communities that were delinquent in submitting reports, especially those in multiple years or "At Risk" communities. During the meeting, this presentation seemed to garner a lot of attention and questions from legislators regarding potential, corrective actions. The concern is primarily transparency and oversight for public funds used by governmental entities. The NEGRC's planning staff routinely advises local governments on reporting requirements to maintain their Qualified Local Government (QLG) status. For those interested, we can share a link to an interactive map from the presentation that shows these communities and their standing with DOAA.

NADO Innovation Award

Executive Director Walker stated that the NEGRC is a member of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), with a membership of 500 regional commissions across the country. Our workforce division applied to NADO to receive their Aliceann Wohlbruck NADO Impact Award (formerly known as the Innovation Award). We were notified that our Foothills Regional High School Welding Program was selected to receive this prestigious award. This welding program is unique and affects communities and students across jurisdictional boundaries, making it truly regional in application and effect. We expect a formal announcement in the upcoming weeks from NADO that we will publicize but want to recognize our Workforce Division and its Workforce Board for their efforts today.

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



Presentation

Chairperson Blechinger provided an introduction of the Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) Director of Equity and Inclusion, Freddie Broome. Mr. Broome shared with the Council information about the "Embrace Civility" program including adopting a Civility Pledge and training opportunities for local governments. After concluding the presentation, Mayor Girtz asked Director Walker if a resolution could be considered by the NEGRC Council. Walker responded that a resolution could be available as early as October for Council review/adoption.

Other Business

Chairperson Blechinger announced that she is not seeking re-election as Mayor of Auburn this November. Consequently, her term as Mayor and NEGRC Council Chairperson will conclude at the end of this year. Vice Chairperson John Daniell will ascend to the NEGRC Chairperson starting on January 1, 2024 and to complete her unexpired term (1.5 years).

This results in an upcoming vacancy for a Mayor as Council Secretary. To fill this vacancy in accordance with NEGRC bylaws, a Nominating Committee needs appointment. She then asked the following Councilmembers to serve on the Nominating Committee: Mayor Girtz, who will act as Chairman, along with Billy Pittard and Bill Palmer. The Committee will meet next month and will later present their mayoral nomination at the November Council meeting.

She then reminded attendees that the next NEGRC Council meeting is scheduled for October 19, 2023.

Adjournment

With no further business before the Council, Chairperson Blechinger adjourned the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

Julie Ball, Executive Assistant
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

October 19, 2023

Date Approved