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Date: November 16, 2023

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Location: Trumps Catering

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## Minutes

### **Members Present:**

Linda Blechinger  
John Daniell  
David Dyer  
Dodd Ferrelle  
Cary Fordyce  
Kelly Girtz  
Daniel Graves  
Doug Haynie  
Todd Higdon  
Don Jernigan  
Janet Jones  
Terry Lawler  
Blake McCormack  
Wendell McNeal  
Bill Palmer  
Jay Paul  
Fred Perriman  
Joel Seymour  
Jim Shaw  
Brad Tucker

### **Members Absent:**

Louise Adams  
Marcello Baner  
Ronnie Boggs  
Phil Brock  
Michael Coile  
Tom Crow  
Pat Graham  
Serra Hall  
Steve Horton  
John Howard  
Tommie Jennings  
Jesse Johnson  
Dee Lindsey  
Byron Lombard  
Billy Pittard  
Flemie Pitts  
Roy Roberts  
Shane Short  
Craig Snow  
Amy Stone  
David Thompson  
William Trimier  
Lee Vaughn

### **Guests Present:**

Wendy Bond, Winterville  
Crystal Brock, Bogart  
Katrina Cochran, Senator Warnock  
Allen Hulme, Elbert County  
Bob Mackey, Morgan County  
Kevin Mason, Collins GA-10  
David Nunn, Madison County  
Clay Pilgrim, Rushton, LLC  
Brent Williams, ACCG

### **Staff Present:**

Julie Ball  
Mark Beatty  
Carol Cofer  
Peggy Jenkins  
Sophia Primer  
Burke Walker

### **Call to Order**

Chairperson Linda Blechinger called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. She noted her attendance at the GARC Conference the week preceding the Council meeting, expressing her positive impression of its quality and informative sessions. She welcomed attendees to the November 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.

Chairperson Blechinger informed the attendees that the minutes from October 19, 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 Mayor Fred Perriman and seconded by Mayor Kelly Girtz. The motion passed unanimously.



## **Items of Local Interest**

Chairperson Linda 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 – Mayor Linda Blechinger**

- Municipal elections were held, and four of five cities in Barrow will have new Mayors. The City of Winder will have a runoff for an at-large Council seat.
- Their TSPLOST passed by 64%.

### **Athens-Clarke County – Mayor Kelly Girtz**

- Advantage Behavioral Health will open a facility in Athens-Clarke County.

### **Elbert County – Allen Hulme for Chairman Lee Vaughn**

- Their TSPLOST passed by 55%.
- County Commissioners have formed a committee to offer more exemptions for senior citizens.
- More applications have been submitted for large solar farms.
- A new 50,000-square-foot spec building will be constructed in the Elberton Industrial Park.

### **Greene County – Terry Lawler**

- There was a ribbon cutting ceremony this month in Union Point to officially open the 6.5-mile portion of the 39-mile-long Firefly Trail. Greene County became the first county to complete its portion from Union Point to Athens.
- Due to continued rapid population growth, the county's recreation department's fall sports programs have grown by over 30% since last fall.
- The Greene County Board of Commissioners and the Greene County School Board approved their 2024 millage rates. Both entities lowered their 2024 millage rates from their 2023 rates. Greene County has the 14th lowest effective millage rate of Georgia's 159 counties.
- Tri-County Gas's water and gas meter changeout program to consolidate Greensboro and Union Point customers has been completed.
- Frey-Moss Structures is relocating from Conyers to Greensboro. The new facility will be approximately 100,000 square feet.
- Pure Beauty Farms in Greensboro is devoted to growing 625,000 Poinsettias in all sizes. The Poinsettias will be sold in every Home Depot store from Texas to the Carolinas.



## Committee Reports

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

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

First, the Committee reviewed the September 2023 financial statements for the 3rd month of the fiscal year that reported revenues in excess of expenditures by \$106,582.33. The expenditures for this period align with the FY24 budgeted projections, with 71% of the budget remaining. Mayor Fred Perriman made a motion to accept the report as presented. The motion was seconded by Terry Lawler. The motion passed unanimously.

Second, Sophia Primer confirmed that during the audit process for FY2023, it was determined that several line-item budget adjustments are needed in three budget areas. These areas include the following:

- **General Fund**
  - Decrease Purchased and Contract Services Expenditures by \$4,500
  - Increase Supplies and Materials Expenditures by \$4,000
  - Increase Fringe Benefit Expenditures by \$500
- **WorkForce Development**
  - Decrease Purchased and Contract Services Expenditures by \$20,500
  - Increase Salary Expenditures by \$15,500
  - Increase Indirect Expenditures by \$5,000
- **Planning and Government Services**
  - Decrease Fringe Benefits by \$3,700
  - Increase Salary Expenditures by \$700
  - Increase Purchased and Contract Services Expenditures by \$3,000

Mayor Perriman made a motion to approve these FY2023 adjustments, as presented. The motion was seconded by Terry Lawler. The motion passed unanimously.

The NEGRC's FY23 Financial Audit was performed by Rushton and Company again this year. Mr. Clay Pilgrim of Rushton reviewed the final FY23 Financial Audit with the Committee this morning. Mayor Perriman asked Mr. Pilgrim to come forward to present the Annual Audit Report for Fiscal Year 2023 to the Council. After Mr. Pilgrim's presentation, Mayor Perriman made a motion to accept the Commission's Fiscal Year 2023 Financial Audit report, as presented. The motion was seconded by Terry Lawler. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Mayor Ferrelle said the Program-of-Work Committee met before today's Council meeting to review one project request and five project closeouts for the month. These require Council action today.



One project request was received for the following:

- The City of Winterville requested assistance facilitating a retreat for the mayor and council members. There is no fee for this assistance.

The five project closeouts for the month include the following that were completed and officially closed by the Commission's staff:

- The City of Siloam for updating their comprehensive plan
- The City of Union Point for updating their comprehensive plan
- The City of White Plains for updating their comprehensive plan
- The City of Auburn for updating their comprehensive plan
- Madison County for grant writing and administration of an approved Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for water-system improvements.

Based on a recommendation by the Executive Director followed by the Committee's review, the Committee recommended approving these project requests and closeouts for inclusion in the FY2024 program-of-work, as presented. A motion was made by Mayor Dodd Ferrelle and seconded by David Dyer. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Planning and Government Services – Brad Tucker for Mayor John Howard**

Mr. Tucker said the PGS Committee has one item on the agenda that requires Council action today: the review and approval of the annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy implementation report. This report outlines economic development activities performed by the PGS Division from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023. These activities collectively contribute to implementing the CEDS five-year Action Plan and outline a total estimated project impact of \$46.7 million in public and private investment. The report was shared with the Council as part of the meeting agenda.

The Committee recommended approval of the 2023 CEDS report. A motion was made by Brad Tucker and seconded by Mayor Kelly Girtz. The motion passed unanimously.

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

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

### **Age-Friendly Designation**

Executive Director Walker discussed the "Age-Friendly" Designation program offered by AARP for local governments. Through this designation, AARP helps participating communities to become more livable and age-friendly by creating safer and more walkable streets, needed housing and transportation options, better access to key services, and opportunities for residents to participate in community activities. Many of these objectives coincide with the NEGRRC's programmatic activities with aging services, transportation planning, and community planning. In January, Kay Sabetta of AARP, will attend the Council meeting and give a brief



presentation about the Age-Friendly designation. The Council could also act on this proposed designation at that meeting by adopting the AARP resolution. Seven other Regional Commissions and two cities in the NEGRC participate in this designation. An AARP flyer about this program will be sent to the Council before the January meeting.

### **Annual Report Presentation**

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that, as he'd previously reported, the NEGRC's first annual report was finalized and ready for publication and distribution. This report summarizes FY23 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023) activities across the four Divisions. This should complement the auditor's report and shed light on our budget's actual impact on people and communities. This impact is shown by people served, employers served, projects, and other measurables. The report will be printed for direct mailing to Council members and will be available electronically. Executive Director Walker thanked Mark Beatty and the other NEGRC Division Directors for their work in providing the data needed to make this report a reality.

### **Southern Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC)**

Executive Director Walker reported that NEGRC staff had submitted grant applications to SCRC. SCRC is a state-federal partnership similar to the Appalachian Regional Commission, except that it covers non-ARC counties and those primarily in the southern part of the state. Unique to Northeast Georgia is that some counties are within SCRC, giving our region access to both programs. The pre-applications submitted recently were approved to proceed with a full application. Rusty Haygood informed Executive Director Walker at DCA that they were very selective in these reviews, narrowing the number down from over eighty applications. Two NEGRC Divisions, Planning & Government Services and Worksource, participated in these applications with projects respective to their programmatic responsibilities.

### **2023-2024 House Rural Development Council**

Executive Director Walker informed the Council that the House Rural Development Council held a meeting in Athens. The agenda is largely related to healthcare, with some other entities presenting. Terry Matthews attended on behalf of the Georgis Association of Regional Commissions. Nothing on the agenda pertains directly to Regional Commissions.

### **Senate Committee on SDS**

Executive Director Walker discussed the recent Senate Subcommittee on Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) meeting in Braselton that Senator Frank Ginn co-chaired. Senator Ginn asked PGS Director Mark Beatty to provide information on the Regional Commission's GIS mapping capabilities and assistance available to local governments. The GARC's legislative liaison, Scott Maxwell, follows this Committee and attended the meeting.

Chairperson Blechinger commended Burke Walker as an excellent representative for the Council, highlighting his effective advocacy for the needs of cities and counties.

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



### **Nominating Committee Report – Mayor Kelly Girtz**

Mayor Girtz said the Nominating Committee met last month. The Committee considered Council members who are mayors to fill an upcoming vacancy for Council Secretary. The nominated Secretary will serve as a Council Officer with the previously elected Vice Chairperson and Secretary starting on January 1, 2024.

The Nominating Committee recommended Mayor Dodd Ferrelle to serve as a Council Officer and Secretary on the Commission's Council. A motion was made by Mayor Kelly Girtz and seconded by Mayor Daniel Graves. The motion passed unanimously.

Before Mayor Girtz concluded his report, he said the Council would like to offer their gratitude and recognize Chairperson Blechinger's years of service as a Council Officer and Chairperson. As a small token of the Council's appreciation, Mayor Girtz asked Chairperson Blechinger to accept a Chairperson's award and plaque to commemorate her many years of service to Northeast Georgia. He said Chairperson Blechinger has been a leader statewide, and we have been lucky to have her. He then presented the plaque to Chairperson Blechinger.

Chairperson Blechinger thanked everyone for her award and then asked the newly elected Secretary to come forward to receive his oath.

Chairperson Blechinger told the Council it has been a privilege for her to serve as their Chairperson and Council Officer over the years. The region remains a vital resource to our local governments that support our collective interests. I trust our new Council Officer and those previously elected in June will continue to provide direction and governance to the Commission during your years of service. She also said she hoped to see a new building erected sometime in the near future. She then swore in Dodd Ferrelle as NEGRC Council Secretary.

### **Other Business**

Chairperson Blechinger led a prayer for Shane Short.

She mentioned today's meeting would be the last meeting of the year and her last meeting as the Chairperson. Chairman Daniell will serve as your Chairperson beginning on January 1, 2024, filling her unexpired term. She wished everyone and their families well for a safe and enjoyable holiday season.



**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

January 18, 2024

Date Approved