

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings and Happy New Year,

The end of 2024 was spent reacquainting myself with the commute to 305 Research Drive, the capable staff within these brick walls, and the outstanding leaders positioned across our 12 counties. I'm honored by the Council's selection. It is heartening to be serving the best region in Georgia once again. While any new job comes with its share of daunting tasks, I'm confident the warm welcome and support I received have positioned me for success.

As we emerge from the holiday season, January marks a time for resolution and action. (If you're in need of strategic retreat facilitation, please reach out!) Here at the Regional Commission, we're full steam ahead into 2025. In case our annual report for FY24 didn't make it onto your holiday reading list, here are a few quick highlights:

- During FY24 (July 1 – June 30), the NEGRC provided a \$1 to \$20 (dues to program funds) ROI to our member governments.
- The Workforce Division (WIOA), led by Director Carol Rayburn Cofer, delivered over \$3.6M on career guidance information, educator externships, and training scholarships. To give an idea of the impact of the scholarships, alone: 761 persons received training services and 221 different employers benefitted by hiring individuals who received WIOA-funded training.
- Planning and Government Services (PGS) secured over \$1.7M in state and federal funding for local government projects in the region. Director Mark Beatty and his staff also prepared 16 local and regional plans, and tackled other local, regional, and state-wide planning, GIS, and economic and community development projects.
- Last, but not least, Director Peggy Jenkins and her team with our Area Agency on Aging (AAA) successfully delivered over \$10.7M to qualified residents and caregivers through programs and support services, including meal delivery, in-home and personal care, recreation and education programs, and transportation services.

I'm incredibly lucky to be working alongside everyone in those three divisions, as well as our skilled Administration team who take care of staff, make sure the lights stay on, and keep me moving ahead in all 12 directions. I hope you find the articles within this quarterly informative, and that they help further illustrate the positive impacts those programs are making.

We look forward to serving you in the new year and are optimistic the incoming administration in D.C. will look fondly on Georgia and our Northeast Region as they shape the programs that help support so much of the work we do. In the meantime, let's all make an effort to share in (in the immortal words of Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter) "a bit of that elusive pleasure we call Southern hospitality."

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director



*NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy*

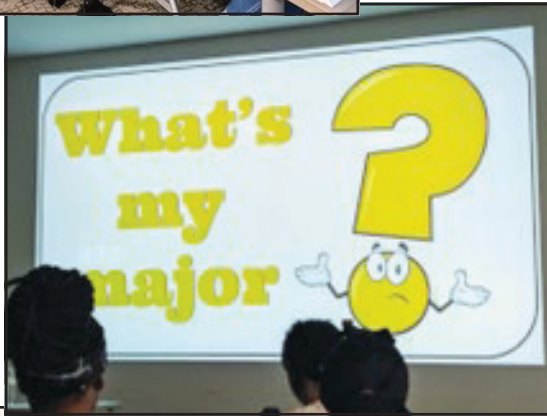
COLLEGE PREPARATION WINTER 2024 WORKSHOP

Students from the WIOA/ACTION, Inc. High School Youth program attended a Winter Workshop in December, which focused on developing post-graduation plans. Valuable information was presented regarding the college application process, financial aid, scholarship applications, and valuable advice from graduates from the High School Youth Program who are current college students. Graduates from the High School Youth program, now attending Georgia Southern University, Columbus State University, Clark Atlanta University, Albany State University, Savannah State University, Valdosta State University and North Carolina Wesleyan University and Athens Technical

College, presented information about their college experiences and how to better prepare for college. 60 students from eleven of the twelve NEGA counties attended the Saturday workshop held at Piedmont Athens Regional Oconee Campus. Parents and Career Coaches also attended. For further information on this program, please contact **Rima Sullivan**, WIOA/WorkSource Northeast Georgia Youth Coordinator at **(706) 369-5703**.



Group Picture of Workshop Participants



Workshop Presentation



Graduate Panel



Mrs. Vaughn of GA Student Finance Commission

NEGRC COMPLETES A REGIONAL GEOSPATIAL STRATEGY

The Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division has completed a geospatial assessment for the region and produced the 2025-2027 Geospatial Strategy. This strategy will serve as a business-oriented plan to define how the PGS Division will use GIS to increase efficiency, productivity, and collaboration for spatial analysis projects across the region over the next 3 years. Click here to view the NEGRC's 2025-2027 Geospatial Strategy:

<https://arcg.is/1yufnu>.

The Strategy's vision, goals, and action items are focused on the following:

1. Improving internal services and workflows,
2. Expanding services provided to local governments,
3. Supporting the region's GIS community, and
4. Connecting the region with state and federal GIS resources.

The Strategy outlines specific action items to be completed by the NEGRC. Some examples include completing a data inventory of internal data, developing new services such as drone photography and asset mapping, and preparing the region for the role-out of NextGen 911 and the 2030 Census.

We want to thank our steering committee, which consisted of members of the region's GIS and local government workforce, for their time in helping to create this strategy. If you have any questions about the Strategy or how the NEGRC can help your community through GIS, please reach out to **Phillip Jones**, GIS Manager, at pjones@negrc.org.

REGIONAL RESILIENCE PLANNING

Stakeholders from the Northeast Georgia, Middle Georgia, and Three Rivers Regions came together in October in Macon for a Regional Resilience Convening. The meeting was led by the University of Georgia Institute for Resilient Infrastructure Services (UGA IRIS), with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts. NEGRC was represented at the event by Mark Beatty and Carol Flaute from the Planning and Government Services Division.

This event was one of several regional convenings organized by UGA IRIS across the state to build upon the statewide Georgia Resilience Roundtable, which took place in Atlanta in 2023. It brought together regional practitioners and community partners to focus on regional planning efforts around a variety of resilience issues, such as hazards, infrastructure, water management, land use development, and energy reliability. Participants shared ideas and perspectives on what is needed to strengthen the ability of water, transportation, and energy systems to withstand threats such as flooding, drought, extreme heat, wind damage, and wildfire.

In addition to this effort, NEGRC staff are participating in the **Metro Atlanta Climate Action Plan (MACAP)** for the 29-county

Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area. The plan seeks to create a voluntary roadmap to a more sustainable, more prosperous, and healthier future. Several NEGRC communities are included within the project's focus area, prompting the NEGRC's participation.

If you would like to learn more about climate resiliency efforts that your community could be pursuing, contact Senior Community Planner, **Carol Flaute**, at cflaute@negrc.org.

GTA AWARDS 2024 CONFERENCE IN COLUMBUS

Two staff members of the Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division attended the Georgia Transit Association's annual conference in Columbus, Georgia where several Northeast Georgia communities were recognized for their outstanding service in the arena of public transportation.

Athens-Clarke County Transit was honored with the 2024 Innovation Award. The Georgia Transit Association Innovation Award memorializes community investment in continuous improvements in public transportation for all of Athens-Clarke County. The award recognizes ACC Transit's transformative initiatives, including:

- Improving wayfinding through 500 site-specific static signs and 50 digital signs including solar-powered e-ink signs, informational kiosks, and onboard displays providing real-time navigation information to riders.
- Completing a \$10 million sales tax-funded Multimodal Transportation Center, positioned for future commuter rail integration.
- Using funds from two voter-approved Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) programs, which officials said has increased transit revenue by 50%, from \$6 million to \$9 million annually, while maintaining a fare-free system since the COVID-19 pandemic.



Rachel Hopkins, Marketing Coordinator, receiving the 2024 Innovation Award for Athens-Clarke County at the Georgia Transit Association 2024 Conference

Also, Elbert County Transit was recognized for promoting National Rural Transit Day (July 16) through social media and marketing materials. National Rural Transit Day is an annual holiday established by the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) in 2019 and has been celebrated every July 16 since. It is dedicated to recognizing rural transit providers and highlights the initiatives agencies take to honor passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and throughout the year.



Billy Jones (middle), Elbert County Transit Director, receiving a certificate or Elbert Transit's participation in the promotion of Rural Transit at the Georgia Transit Association 2024 Conference

The NEGRC would like to congratulate these two communities for their recognition and their commitment to providing exceptional transit service within our region!

CITY OF JEFFERSON IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JACKSON COUNTY AWARDED \$600,000+ BY APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION

The City of Jefferson and Jackson County have partnered to construct a sewer extension to the Jackson County Airport to support economic development initiatives. The project is part of Jackson County's three-phased effort to expand the airport, encouraging growth in aviation support industries, increased hangar space, and commercial development. The project was awarded \$624,291 in November by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a federal entity that facilitates economic development across 13 states. The project is estimated to be complete by 2027 and will initially support 4 existing businesses and create 6 new jobs.

The NEGRC Planning and Government Services (PGS) Division provided assistance with the procurement of engineering services and grant writing for the project as part of its programmatic service delivery to ARC communities. If you are within the Northeast Georgia ARC service area (Barrow, Elbert, Jackson, and Madison counties) and have questions about how to access funding from their programs, please contact **Mark Beatty**, Director of PGS, at mbeatty@negrc.org or (706) 369-5650.

NEWTON COUNTY IS BUILDING A SECOND SENIOR CENTER

Newton County's senior population is rapidly growing and has become one of the fastest growing counties of seniors in the state of Georgia. Newton County government and citizens recognized with the rapid increase in senior housing, the only Senior Center is overcrowded and the needs of activities and programs for seniors are essential in keeping with their mission of providing a safe, well-planned community that respects and values an informed citizenry, embraces diversity, preserves natural resources and cultivates economic and social opportunities.

On November 13, 2024, more than 50 seniors along with County officials and staff gathered at Denny Dobbs Park to witness the groundbreaking of Newton County future Senior Enrichment Center. The new center, located just off Hwy 212 on Richard Chapel Road, will provide a more accessible location for people living on the west side of Newton County and will allow additional space for the growing Newton County Senior Citizens.

The roughly 11,000 square-foot building featuring meeting spaces, offices, and indoor and outdoor activity space will be located on 5 acres of land. Newton County voters approved to continue the 1-percent Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for 2023. Included in the 2023 SPLOST allocation was \$4,000,000 for a new Senior Center which is set open September 2025.



Above: County officials, Senior Center Director Freda Reed (5th from left), and former RC Executive Director, Burke Walker (3rd from right) featured in pictures.



JACKSON COUNTY SENIOR CENTER GRAND RE-OPENING CEREMONY

Jackson County's senior population is rapidly growing and has become one of the fastest growing counties of seniors in the state of Georgia. Jackson County government recognized the rapid growth and applied for the Community Development Block Grant and was awarded \$1 Million to complete the expansion of the senior center. The grant allowed the center to expand to over 2000 square feet which increased square footage in the fellowship hall and gym. Space was also added for classes and meeting rooms.

On Friday, November 1, 2024, the Jackson County Senior Center had its grand re-opening ceremony with the theme, "A New Beginning." County officials, staff, and seniors gathered to tour the center and celebrate being back at the center.

The Jackson County Senior Center serves over 260 clients. The site continues to grow. If you or someone you know in Jackson County who is in need of meal supports, please contact or visit the Jackson County Senior Center or call Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging at 1-888-808-8020 to learn more about meal programs and services availability.



Happy Seniors and attendees in the Fellowship Hall

NORTHEAST GEORGIA CAREGIVERS CELEBRATED

November was designated as National Caregivers Month. The Rosalyn Carter Institute and the Northeast Georgia Care-Net celebrated the caregivers of Northeast Georgia. On November 7, 2024, a celebration was held at Trumps Catering to honor the Caregivers of Northeast Georgia.

Nikki Simmons and **Lilianna Hanley** were named Family Caregiver of the Year. Mrs. Simmons served as caregiver to her mother battling cancer until she transitioned in 2023. Nikki continued in the caregiver role as her grandmother also received cancer and dementia diagnoses. Nikki faithfully took care of her grandmother until she transitioned in Spring 2024. Nikki maintained a full-time job and managed her own health impairments while giving back

Update

to the community. Mrs. Hanley cares for her husband who became a quadriplegic after a water diving accident. Since then, he has had 3 strokes. Lilianna also cared for her mother with dementia until she transitioned. Lilianna provides exceptional care to her husband and works to maintain their household. She does it with a smile and a cheerful outlook. This year was the first year that there were 2 winners in this category, and both deserved the title, **Family Caregiver of the Year**.

Isis Browner was named Paraprofessional Caregiver of the Year. Isis Browner, a home care aide, was nominated for going beyond her assigned duties to care for the clients on her workload. She communicates well with the families and agencies to make sure everyone knows what is going on with their loved ones. She makes an everlasting impact, clients and families often consider her as family. Isis is an exceptional paraprofessional caregiver, but she is also an exceptional caregiver in her personal life as she cares for her son with disabilities.

Felicia Hubbard was named the Volunteer Caregiver of the Year. Felicia Hubbard is the First Lady at Shiloh Baptist Church in Carlton, GA. She goes beyond the expectations of a First Lady. She offers a helping hand to anyone. She serves as the Youth Choir Director and Women's Ministry Director. First Lady Hubbard also gives back to the community. She coordinates efforts to gather donations for homeless shelters and other community outreach opportunities.

The mission of the Northeast Georgia Care-Net is to provide ongoing assessment of community resources, identify and remedy gaps in services, share information and resources among agencies, develop strategies for complementary professional and family caregiver activities, offer caregiver education and, most importantly, advocate for Caregivers. If you need resources or interested in becoming part of the Care-Net please contact the Caregiver Coordinator, **Toshia Lewis** at **1-888-808-8020 ext. 103** or **tlewis@negrc.org**.



Isis Browner receives Paraprofessional Caregiver of the Year Award



Felicia Hubbard receives Volunteer Caregiver of the Year Award



Nikki Simmons receives Family Caregiver of the Year Award

Update

REGIONAL MEETINGS

February

2/19	UOBWA Meeting	9:00 a.m.	NEGRC
2/20	NEGRC Council Meeting	Noon	Trumps Catering

March

3/11	NEGWDB	8:30 a.m.	NEGRC
3/20	NEGRC Council Meeting	Noon	Trumps Catering
3/26	UOBWA Meeting	9:00 a.m.	NEGRC