

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION  
COUNCIL MEETING  
ATHENS HOLIDAY INN  
JANUARY 15, 2015  
NOON**

**MINUTES**

The January meeting of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission Council was held on Thursday, January 15, 2015 at Noon at the Athens Holiday Inn. Chairman Kevin Little called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Graham, Pat  
Blechinger, Linda  
Eisenman, Emily  
Houston, Lamar  
Lyon, Tommy  
Palmer, Bill  
Trammell, Gene  
Dyer, David  
Dove, Anthony  
Gandy, Roy  
Ainslie, Andy  
Perriman, Fred  
Bentley, David  
Ellis, Keith  
Roseberry, Jerry  
Turner, Frank  
Ivie, Charles  
Harden, Amrey  
Pittard, Billy  
Boggs, Ronnie  
Johnson, Jesse  
Little, Kevin  
Fordyce, Carey

**Members Absent:**

Graham, Ernie  
Denson, Nancy  
Guest, Larry  
Bullard, Ed  
Brock, Phil  
Duvall, Valerie  
Crow, Tom  
Plott, Roy  
Fenn, Josh  
Blackmon, Jody  
Davis, Melvin  
Thompson, Greg  
Knight, Harry  
Roberts, Roy

**Associate Members Present:**

Ouzts, Buddy  
Horton, Harold  
Seymour, Joel  
Adams, Louise  
Pitts, Flemmie

**Guests Present:**

Ross King  
Beth Brown  
Kathy Papa  
T.K. Adams  
Daniella Belton  
Andrea Daniel  
Bob Thomas  
Sharyn Dickerson

**Media Present:**

Blake Giles, **Oconee Enterprise**

**Staff Present:**

Jim Dove Executive Director  
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant  
Evans Brinson, Comptroller  
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director  
Kay Bridges, Accounting Manager

## CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Little called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, staff, and media. He asked for a motion to approve the November meeting minutes. Such a motion was made by Commissioner Tommy Lyon and seconded by Mr. Dave Bentley. The motion carried unanimously.

## ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

**Newton County:** The Chamber of Commerce has a new President, and Commissioner Ellis reports that the County has a lot of economic development prospects. Between employees and construction crews, approximately 3,000 persons are working on the Baxter International site. Due to the complete renovation of Downtown Covington, it is enjoying the largest crowds shopping than ever before, and the Mystic Grill is bringing in people from all over the world. The County has several ongoing transportation projects that are being funded by leftover SPLOST funds. Executive Director Jim Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck will be facilitating the annual Newton County Planning Session in late February.

**Oconee County:** The Oconee County BOC will hold a two-day planning session on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> hosted by NEGRC and facilitated by Executive Director Dove and Ms. Beck. The Mars Hill widening project is ongoing and moving along without any delays. The 2015 SPLOST referendum passed with 65% of the vote, and mixed drinks in restaurants also passed with 65% of the vote. The SPLOST and LOST is up 13 to 15 percent over last year, and it is believed that is due in part to Epps Bridge Center.

**Oglethorpe County:** The new tennis courts are nearing completion. The County is having meetings with Madison and Elbert Counties to discuss the possibility of doing some joint paving projects. Oglethorpe County paved approximately 14 ½ miles last year and when compared to contract paving, that was a savings of over \$800,000. There will be a Georgia Trust ramble on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Council member Jesse Johnson gave a very strong showing in his recent bid for State Representative.

**Walton County:** The recent Audit shows that Walton County is in very sound financial condition, with a fund balance of \$21.8 million out of a \$46 million budget. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> year that the County has a fund balance in excess of \$20 million; and this past year \$1.3 million was returned to the taxpayers in Walton County. The County closed the deal on a 160,000 sq. ft. building formerly owned by Angel Food Ministries. It is anticipated that a current prospect, an affiliate of Caterpillar, will be locating in this building and will bring 80 additional jobs to the County.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Audit & Finance:** The Committee met prior to the Council meeting and reviewed the financial statements for the six-month period ending December 31, 2014. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$7,050. Financial activity for the six-month period was approximately ½ of the annual 2015 Budget projections. A motion to approve the report as presented was made by Mr. Frank Turner and seconded by Commissioner Anthony Dove. The motion carried unanimously. On another matter, the Committee reviewed the five proposals submitted in response to the Request for Proposals for Audit Service for the NEGRC. On a recommendation from the Audit & Finance Committee, a motion to accept the proposal offered by Mauldin & Jenkins to serve as the independent Auditor for Fiscal Years 2015, 2016, and 2017 was made by Mr. Turner and seconded by Commissioner Dove. The motion carried unanimously.

**Program of Work:** The Program of Work Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the following technical assistance requests for the month.

1. **TOWN OF BRASELTON** – Assistance in preparing an update to their Comprehensive Plan. Any applicable fees for the update will be quoted after preliminary meetings with the City and determination of the Plan's components.
2. **CITY OF MADISON** - Assistance in facilitating meetings related to developing the Comprehensive Plan Update. The fee for this assistance will be based on actual cost, not to exceed \$1,000.
3. **CITY OF PORTERDALE** – Assistance in developing a 2015 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) re-application for sewer system improvements. The fee for this re-application is \$1,000.
4. **ELBERT COUNTY** – Assistance in developing an update to the Hazard Mitigation Plan. The fee for this assistance is \$21,000, provided through a GEMA grant and matched by the County with in-kind labor.
5. **ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY** – Assistance in developing GIS mapping to benefit the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia and support its "Ending Childhood Hunger Program". There is no fee for this initial assistance.
6. **CITY OF AUBURN** – Assistance in developing a 2015 CDBG application for water system improvements. The fee for this assistance is \$2,000.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, a motion to approve the technical assistance requests for the month for inclusion in the 2015 Program of Work, effective January 15, 2015, was made by Commissioner Billy Pittard and seconded by Mr. Bentley.

**Planning & Government Services (PGS):** The PGS Committee met prior to the Council meeting to discuss several items of interest. Of the 29 projects reviewed by members that were requested in 2014, 12 are ongoing, 16 have been completed, and one was cancelled. Members felt that these projects, overall, were broad in their application, with progress being made on the region's overall improvement. No Council action was needed.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Dove reported that planning sessions/retreats are in full swing. In mid-December, he and Ms. Beck facilitated a planning session for the Jefferson Downtown Development Authority; on January 7<sup>th</sup>, they conducted a session for the Greene County Board of Commissioners; and on January 12<sup>th</sup>, a planning retreat was facilitated for the Braselton Downtown Development Authority. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, the Walton County Board of Commissioners will hold a planning session, followed by a similar event for the Oconee Board of Commissioners on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Future sessions are scheduled for the City of Madison, the Newton County Board of Commissioners, the Elbert County Board of Commissioners, the Town of Braselton, the City of Elberton, and the Barrow County Board of Commissioners.

Executive Director Dove will be attending the Development District Association of Appalachia Winter Board Meeting in Knoxville on January 25<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup>. He is the First Vice President of the Association, and the group is working to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) this year. The ARC has benefitted Barrow, Jackson, Madison, and Elbert Counties greatly throughout its history, and the federal/state partnership fared well in the FY2015 Federal Budget.

Executive Director Dove recently participated in both the Newly Elected Commissioners Conference and the Legislative Institute held on the University of Georgia Campus at the Georgia Center. Ross King invited him to participate on a panel explaining the role of Regional Commissions. He and Ms. Beck hosted the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions Exhibit at the Resource Fair. In addition, they manned the exhibit at the Legislative Institute and participated in various sessions.

PGS staff has been very busy working on comprehensive plans and special projects for local governments. They are currently assisting the Cities of Commerce and Bowman in the development of target area plans that will be integrated into their respective comprehensive plans. Planning for these target areas is somewhat unique, but is something that can be replicated in other areas. Another example of a special project is one that staff recently completed for Barrow County. Chairperson Pat Graham asked if special maps could be prepared that would depict such things as poverty areas, fire response times, etc. Staff was able to prepare those in a period of nine days.

Executive Director Dove advised that the spring 2015 Georgia Academy for Economic Development will be held on February 18<sup>th</sup>, March 18<sup>th</sup>, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, and May 27<sup>th</sup>. This four-day course is offered each spring in Region 5. The program is designed to enhance community leaders' skills and knowledge so that more communities in Georgia may remain or become successful. Over 5,500 Georgians have graduated from this program. For additional information, contact Kathy Papa with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

## **PGS DIVISION UPDATE: PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION PLANS & OTHER EFFORTS**

At this time, PGS Director Burke Walker gave an update on activities of the PGS division. Staff is preparing to begin another round of updates to Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Plans. The plans are required by counties under the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 and provide eligibility for FEMA funding under Hazard Mitigation Grants. PGS staff prepared seven of the twelve plans in the region, and will soon be contacting EMA Directors and other interested parties to inform about the next update and NEGRC's potential involvement. Everyone is encouraged to contact PGS staff with any questions, especially when the grant is received. GEMA has looked at Comp Plans and would like to have integration into the plans. This would be a good idea since any potential Natural Disaster can obviously affect economic development, local infrastructure, and other strategies identified in long-range planning. Mr. Walker advised there was strong participation from Northeast Georgia in the Plan First Community Awards. Athens-Clarke County, the City of Madison, and the Town of Braselton received this designation. PlanFirst rewards communities for successfully implementing their comprehensive plans. As a continuation of NEGRC's tourism planning efforts and the completed Regional Tourism Strategy, staff will be conducting a Tourism Forum in Winterville on Feb. 20, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. at the historic depot. Attendees will receive details on tourism efforts on a regional level and explore needs and/or concerns. The PGS Division will be coordinating a new educational session in early March, and the topic will be Environmental Grants and Programs (hope to involve GEFA,EPD,EPA). These programs are offered at no cost and make available state and federal agency staff to local governments in our region. There will be a brief explanatory presentation followed by resource tables to meet individually with program representatives.

## **ACCG PRESENTATION**

The next item on the agenda was a presentation on ACCG by Executive Director Ross King. Mr. King began his report by stating how much he appreciates the relationship between ACCG and NEGRC and the outstanding leadership in the Northeast Georgia Region. He mentioned those from the region who have served and are presently serving as Officers of ACCG. Melvin Davis is Past President, Kevin Little is the current President, and Tommy Lyon is 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, and Billy Pittard serves on the Board of Managers. He stressed what they had meant to ACCG and how much he values their friendship. Mr. King talked about his working relationship with GMA and how proud he is of his relationship with Lamar Norton, Executive Director of that organization. He applauded Executive Director Dove for being recognized by his peers and being elected President of the GARC for the second time. ACCG has built a solid foundation in public policy and advocacy as the voice for county government at the state and local level. Today, ACCG uses a well-defined policy development process to build consensus among county officials on legislative issues. ACCG believes a commitment to continuing education provides county officials with tools, resources, and leadership skills to enhance decision-making within their communities, and it offers training and certification courses for county officials in partnership with the Carl Vinson Institute of

Government at UGA. The commitment of ACCG to help county government operate both efficiently and effectively is best demonstrated through the success of its member services programs such as insurance programs, retirement services, financial services programs, group purchasing/employee discounts, and technical assistance to member governments and related associations. In the coming year, Mr. King feels there will be some successes in efforts related to transportation, tax reform, and juvenile justice. He believes the legislative session will be long, and feels that it is very important for everyone to stay engaged.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

The next meeting will be held on February 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck  
Executive Assistant