

**NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
HILTON GARDEN INN
APRIL 21, 2016
NOON**

MINUTES

Members Present:

Blechinger, Linda
Ferrelle, Dodd
Houston, Lamar
Palmer, Bill
Bullard, Ed
Crow, Tom
Plott, Roy
Shaw, Jim
Trammell, Gene
Workman, Stone
Gandy, Roy
Perriman, Fred
Bentley, David
Roseberry, Jerry
Turner, Frank
Davis, Melvin
Ivie, Charles
Harden, Amrey
Pittard, Billy
Berry, Rick
Chambers, Joyce

Members Absent:

Graham, Pat
Bartlett, Wayne
Denson, Nancy
Lyon, Tommy
Guest, Larry
Brock, Phil
Duvall, Valerie
Dyer, David
Dove, Anthony
Blackmon, Jody
Warren, Ellen
Ellis, Keith
Johnson, Jesse
Little, Kevin
Thompson, Greg
Roberts, Roy
Fordyce, Cary

Staff Present:

Jim Dove, Executive Director
Mott Beck, Executive Assistant
Carol R. Cofer, Workforce Development Director
Burke Walker, Planning & Government Services Director
Theresa Owen, Planner
Evans Brinson, Comptroller

Associate Members Present:

Horton, Harold
Seymour, Joel
Adams, Louise

Guests Present:

Craig Dominy
Donald Harris
Nancy Bobbitt
Linda Parrish
Andrew Seaver

CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Chairman Frank Turner called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. He welcomed members, guests, and staff. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March meeting. **Such a motion was made by Mr. David Bentley and seconded by Mayor Linda Blechinger. The motion carried unanimously.**

ITEMS OF LOCAL INTEREST

Barrow County: At the last meeting of the Barrow County Board of Commissioners, Michael Renshaw was hired as the new County Manager and will begin his duties on May 2nd. Mr. Renshaw has over 20 years working in local government. There are two industrial expansions planned in the County. In Auburn, renovations are ongoing on the old historic building, and 15 acres have been purchased for a new municipal complex. The City is also constructing a bicycle trailhead. An old historic building will be renovated as a replica of the first women's college in Barrow County and the surrounding area. Georgia Cities Week will begin on April 25th; and on Friday of that week, 5th graders from the elementary school will take over as Mayor and Council and hold a mock Council meeting. The downtown main street will be replicating the shops in the Village at St. Simons. A movie is being filmed in Barrow County, and there is an interest in opening two film studios in Auburn.

Clarke County: Winterville Station is a subdivision of 5 – 10 acre plots that will be available in the next few months. The City of Winterville and Oglethorpe County are working together on this project that will benefit everyone. Mayor Dodd Ferrelle recently launched the Safe Routes to School Program that will create an accessible Winterville. Students and all citizens alike will be able to easily and safely walk or bike to and from school and the surrounding area. The City is working to update current guidelines for the Five Points business corridor. The Community Center is open and thriving, and the recent art show held on the site was a huge success. Funds are being raised to complete renovations to the auditorium.

Elbert County: Renovation to the historic hotel in downtown Elberton is ongoing and well ahead of schedule. A walking bridge that was destroyed by falling trees is being replaced at a cost of \$390,000. The County is now managing Bobby Brown Park; and reports are that operations are extremely successful, with excellent participation by citizens and patrons. A special election will be held soon to elect a new Mayor for the City of Bowman. Mayor Pete Gibbons resigned to run for the Senate.

Greene County: The Commissioners have developed an ordinance with guidelines for growers to follow when locating chicken houses in the County. Commissioner Ed Bullard advised that the Workforce Fundamentals Program was a huge success. The program had 28 unemployed participants, and 90% of those now have jobs. He thanked the Regional Commission and Athens Tech for the role they played in this initiative. The land for an expansion to Lake Oconee Academy was sold to the Lake Oconee Foundation, which is a private 501(c) 3. They will acquire a loan to build this addition so that they will have room for Kindergarten through 12th grade. Funds from a \$500,000 grant will be used for improvements on Cary Station Road, along with a 30% match that has been approved by the Board of Commissioners.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Audit & Finance: Members of the Audit & Finance Committee met prior to the Council meeting to review the financial statements for the nine-month period ending March 31, 2016. Revenues exceeded expenses by \$8,356. Financial activity for the period is 3/4th of the annual FY2016 budget. **A motion to accept the report as given was made by Mr. Harden and seconded by Mayor Roy Plott. 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. **CITY OF BRASELTON** – Assistance in preparing a strategic and walkability plan for the downtown. The fee for this assistance is \$1,000 that will also be supported by NEGRC administrative grants.
2. **CITY OF JEFFERSON** – Assistance in development of a Georgia Heritage Grant application. Funds will be used for architectural design for the second floor of the Historic Courthouse. The fee for this assistance is \$500.

Based upon recommendation from the Executive Director, **a motion to approve the Program of Work items for inclusion in the FY2016 Program of Work, effective April 21, 2016, was made by Commissioner Pittard and seconded by Mr. Bentley. The motion carried unanimously.**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Dove and Executive Assistant Mott Beck facilitated a retreat for Newton County on March 30th and Jasper County on April 14th. Both were held at NEGRC headquarters. They have held multiple such sessions with those two counties in recent years, but these by far were the most productive. Consensus was reached on a number of items.

As mentioned at last month's meeting, this is a busy travel time of the year. In early April, Executive Director attended the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) Annual Conference and the legislative conference hosted annually by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). Burke Walker attended the DDAA conference and then stayed for the National Economic Development Administration conference.

When legislation was passed in 2009 to transition from Regional Development Centers to Regional Commissions, there was a provision for three RCs per year to undergo a performance audit to be conducted by the State Department of Audits and Accounts. NEGRC served as the Pilot for such an audit several years ago, and was chosen to be one of the three undertaken this year. The Auditors were at headquarters for the entire week of April 11th. During the exit interview, it was indicated that they had no serious findings or issues with the organization, and in fact, were very complimentary

on a number of matters. The final audit report for the three affected RCs should be released between September 1st and October 15th.

The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions will be holding their Annual Economic Development Conference on May 1st through 3rd. The Conference always has some good speakers from various state agencies. This year's keynote address will be provided by Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black. Executive Director Dove, Mr. Walker, and Lamar Houston represent NEGRC at the Conference.

Ms. Beck will be attending the ACCG annual conference in Savannah beginning on April 29th. In addition to being there to see Chairman Tommy Lyon take the gavel as President of the Association, she will be in charge of and also working at the GARC Exhibit.

LOCAL FOOD AND FARMERS MARKET INITIATIVE

At this time, Planner Theresa Owen gave a presentation on two local food grants that have been successfully awarded in the region. The Local Food, Local Places program is a multi-agency initiative that seeks to boost local economies and drive downtown and neighborhood revitalization through local food initiatives. This is a technical assistance program, with funding available for communities located in Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) counties. Winder is a 2016 recipient of the Local Food, Local Places program and will be awarded \$20,000 to put towards implementation of the Wimberley Center for Community Development. On April 25th and 26th, a team of experts from USDA, EPA, ARC, GDOT, and CDC met with local stakeholders in Winder to develop a plan for the Wimberly Center. The USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program was awarded for the City of Jefferson in 2015. It will enable Jefferson's Main Street program to develop their farmers market. The City will hire two part time employees to manage the market and offer marketing assistance. Additionally, an agritourism geocache trail will be created in Jackson County. The expanded market and agritourism projects are a way to boost the local economy in Jefferson, attract residents and tourists downtown, and promote the rich agricultural heritage in the County. Ms. Owen will be glad to assist any of the governments in the Northeast Georgia region who are interested in this grant opportunity.

GEORGIA'S FILM, MUSIC AND DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT OFFICE

The next item on the agenda was a report by Craig Dominey, Manager and Senior Film Location Specialist with the Georgia Department of Economic Development Film, Music & Digital Entertainment. Film and TV production professions know that Georgia is a Camera Ready state, with highly desirable financial incentives, location diversity, production resources, and professional support to make any size production a true success. Mr. Dominey advised that Georgia was third in film and TV production behind New York and California. Qualifying productions receive a 20% tax credit, plus an additional 10% credit for inserting a Georgia promotion Peach logo in the film title or credits. Other reasons to choose Georgia include state-of-the-art infrastructure, highly

skilled workforce, diverse shooting locations, convenience of direct flights through Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, superb accommodations and restaurants, and a moderate year-round climate. In Fiscal Year 2015, there were 248 combined productions (feature films, TV movies and series, commercials and music videos) and a direct spend of \$1.7 billion; resulting in an economic impact of \$6 billion. Since 2010, numerous studio facilities made announcements to locate to or expand in Georgia. According to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the motion picture and television industry is responsible for more than 79,100 jobs and \$4 billion in total wages in the state, including indirect jobs and wages. These are high quality jobs with an average salary of nearly \$84,000, 75% higher than the average salary nationwide.

OTHER BUSINESS

The next meeting will be held on May 19th, and will be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting. Annual awards will be given at that time.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha J. Beck
Executive Assistant