

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Sam Couvillon, Barbara Brooks, Zack Thompson, Juli Clay, Danny Dunagan, George Wangemann

STAFF PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Angela Sheppard, Denise Jordan, Myron Bennett, Chris Hamilton, Rusty Ligon, Linda MacGregor, Jeremy Perry, Chris Rotalsky

City Manager Bryan Lackey began discussions at 10:30 AM outlining the agenda.

SESSION 1: WATER RESOURCES

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor stated the theme for this part of the retreat was “Big Things Ahead” which placed emphasis on smart bold actions. She thanked the elected officials for implementing the 10-Year Plan. Ms. MacGregor’s updates indicated meters sold, active water accounts and revenue are all on track to meet or exceed 2021 statistics. Also, Lake Lanier Levels have been full most of the time since 2018. Water use is strong and still less than 2006 which displays a culture of water conservation.

Project Updates

Engineering and Construction Division Manager Myron Bennett discussed the following:

- Flat Creek Clarified Rehab
- Riverside Pump Upgrades
- Gillsville Highway Sewer Lift Station
- Stormwater Capital Program
- Boone Street Stormwater Outfall Line
- Gainesville 85 Business Park (video footage supplemented the discussion)

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was an inquiry about Gainesville’s relationship with Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (MNGWPD).*
- *There were comments about mitigating odors.*

Litigation Update

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor briefly discussed successes associated with the Supreme Court Case, return flow (credit for water returned to the basin) and the water control manual/water supply. She also commented on activities forthcoming as a result of litigation.

Regional Activities

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor briefly discussed regional activities associated with the Upper Chattahoochee Basin Group, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) Stakeholders, The Water Tower, National Water Supply Alliance (NWSA) and Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District.

Sewer Lift Stations

Asset Program Manager Chris Hamilton stated there are 69 lift stations responsible for moving wastewater into treatment. He showed a video illustrating how a lift station operates noting technicians check them daily. He commented on the importance of the emergency generators. Mr. Hamilton commented on technology used to automate the lift stations, i.e., Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) Telemetry. He closed by discussing how the department is expanding to address growth.

Council Comments/Questions

- *It was noted most new lift stations are a result of private development.*

Future Water Sources

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor stated the Water Control Manual allocates water to meet the projected 2050 water demand. She indicated discussions are underway for future interconnection with Dahlongega.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was an inquiry about the Cedar Creek Reservoir that prompted a brief overview of this project with background/historical information.*

Big Projects

Engineering and Construction Division Manager Myron Bennett shared history about the Flat Creek Water Reclamation Facility noting the master plan indicates significant upgrades are needed in the near future. The Flat Creek Rebuild is slated for completion in 2050 with a phased approach.

Solids handling and disposal currently requires six trucks/per day to transport sludge to a facility in South Georgia or a landfill. Upgrades are underway to improve the process thus reducing the number of trucks transporting sludge. Water Resources Director Linda MacGregor stated there are big technical issues associated with changing the process. Staff is vetting the options and will be watching others to determine how to move forward.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was a suggestion to become a leader in handling sludge at a net zero cost to the City if possible.*

Funding Large Projects

Water Resources Director Linda MacGregor commented on historical funding options. Going forward, they plan to use cash for regular projects with future discussions for funding larger projects.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was discussion about the Round-Up Program.*
- *Upon inquiry about water meters, there was a discussion about a new program that develops relationships with builders thus being more efficient, with the notation that supply chain issues are real and monitored closely.*
- *There was an inquiry about lot sales at Gainesville 85 Business Park.*

RECESS: 11:53 AM

RECONVENE: 1:13 PM

SESSION 2: PUBLIC WORKS

Transportation Update

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky shared information about the following: Green Street & GDOT Roundabout, Downtown Streetscape, Prior Street Turn Lanes, City Park Roundabout, Greenhill Circle Extension and Downey/South Enota Roundabout.

He reported the department is being proactive to identify potential T-SPLOST projects if this opportunity arises.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was an inquiry as to whether the list of potential T-SPLOST projects would be prioritized.*
- *There was an inquiry as to whether the Oconee Circle/Old Cornelia Highway intersection improvement would be a potential T-SPLOST project.*

Solid Waste

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky provided an overview of the current services offered to residents and the current rate implemented in 2010 with the only change being the addition of recycling carts and garbage carts. The decision to discontinue supplementing the Solid Waste Fund from the General Fund occurred in 2010. It was also noted Hall County increased landfill charges after the budget was adopted. Other increases include leaf and limb fees; curbside rubbish fees and equipment cost.

A graph of the financial impact indicates the fund balance was able to make capital purchases and cover operational expenses through FY2019. The financial implications below emphasize the importance of addressing this fund.

- Equipment cost increased 67% over the last five years
- Tipping fees increased 82% since October 2021
- Fuel cost increased 30% since January 2022

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard stated the gap is so large that a rate increase is required regardless of changes to the level of service.

Mr. Rotalsky presented the following options:

- Option A: Rate increase with existing service, potential biennial tiered increase for 10 years and service automation
- Option B: Rate increase with changes to the service, changes to the pickup location and potential biennial tiered increase for 10 years
- Option C: Privatize with unknown market rate increase, changes to the service and additional unknown changes

Discussion about automation indicated at least six trucks would be needed.

There was discussion about the unknowns of privatization. Research of private service providers did not identify comparable services.

City Manager Bryan Lackey stated a new rate needs to be in place by January 2021.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was consensus for more messaging to bring garbage carts to the street.*
- *There was consensus to explore privatization options for once a week pick-up with leaf/limb service, realizing expectations may become a factor.*
- *Is there any benefit to offering an opt out option?*
- *Is there a different price structure for homes that serve more than one family?*

Sidewalk Program

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky displayed a map of the pedestrian walkways. He discussed the sidewalk system improvement program then provided a brief update about the Pearl Nix Sidewalk Improvement Project and the Downey Boulevard Sidewalk Improvement Project. Mr. Rotalsky closed by briefly discussing the work completed by in-house crews and asked for feedback regarding areas to be addressed.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was an inquiry about sidewalk inventory and repairs.*

RECESS: 2:41 PM

RECONVENE: 3:00 PM

Tax Allocation District (TAD) Discussion

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard presented information about the Midtown TAD. In summary, it was created in 2006 with the first project occurring in 2009. To date, 19 projects have been completed generating a \$120 million investment and representing a \$26 million commitment. She discussed procedural logistics noting payouts occur over time. There are seven pending applications. The “But for Test” was mentioned, i.e., this project would not happen if the TAD didn’t exist. There was also mention of the increased scrutiny TAD projects are receiving. If there’s a desire to establish an ending date, that date should cover all obligations with the understanding that the City does not control the project start date. Three options were presented prompting discussion.

The need to focus on the Westside TAD was noted.

Council Comments/Questions

- *Upon inquiry, it was noted a TAD allocation runs with the property.*
- *Three elected officials spoke in favor of establishing a sunset date for the Midtown TAD with different thoughts about the date to stop accepting applications. All were inclined to set an ending date of December 31, 2039. There was consensus to determine the end date at the April 14, 2022 Work Session.*

Homelessness

Mayor Couvillon shared thoughts about homelessness indicating we can do nothing or we can develop an action plan going forward. He indicated there are approximately 400 homeless people in the area. He asked about the city’s responsibility and expressed a desire to find a non-profit organization with focus on being a homeless shelter.

It was noted most cities address homelessness through non-profit organizations.

Council Comments/Questions

- *There was a request for a partnership that offers warming shelters.*
- *There was a suggestion to correspond with churches inside the city limits and the ministerial association to ask for help finding a solution.*
- *There was discussion about creating a committee focused on finding a solution. Council Member Clay and Council Member Brooks agreed to serve on this committee.*

SESSION 3: COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Housing

City Manager Bryan Lackey prefaced this presentation by commenting on nationwide housing issues related to rental neighborhoods, density and quality.

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon displayed a map anticipating three areas would experience future rezoning applications. He also reviewed the draft version of the Gainesville Residential Design Guide expressing a desire to distribute the guide to future developers as a means for defining/clarifying the city's preferences. He requested input on whether to proceed and how to improve.

RECESS: 4:45 PM
RECONVENE: March 26, 2022, 9:00 AM

RECAP AND DISCUSSION

Council Comments/Questions

- *There were compliments about the Residential Design Guide.*
- *There are some things to think about and some tough decisions to make.*
- *There were compliments about the retreat format offering more informative presentations in an efficient manner.*
- *There were compliments about having a trusting staff.*

SESSION 5: FY2023 LOOK AHEAD & WRAP UP

FY2023 Financial Overview

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry summarized several topics with the first being a diverse revenue source for the General Fund. He also called attention to the decrease in general fund capital transfers. Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) revenues are increasing with the notation that negotiations to distribute via population will begin soon requiring a called meeting. The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VIII overview anticipated \$37 million in revenue. Mr. Perry presented the proposed millage rates with no change in the overall total.

City Manager Bryan Lackey shared salary information specific to the Police Department.

ADJOURNMENT: 9:36 AM

/dj

W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk