

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Sam Couvillon, Zack Thompson, Barbara Brooks, Juli Clay, Danny Dunagan, George Wangemann
STAFF PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Angela Sheppard, Christina Santee, Denise Jordan, Jeremy Perry, Kevin Hutcheson, Brenda Carpio

Mayor Couvillon called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM and served as the presiding officer.

CITY VISION/MISSION & CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE:

City Manager Bryan Lackey opened the retreat with an outline of the scheduled presentations. Then, he proceeded to discuss the budget process, the update to the strategic priorities and a list of the FY23 capital projects. The goal from today's discussion was to establish initiatives for FY2024.

Public Relations Director Christina Santee stated she provides support to all departments and summarized a few accomplishments including but not limited to the Solid Waste Campaign, the employee cornhole tournament and various advertising initiatives. She displayed a video recapping additional activities. In regards to challenges/opportunities, Ms. Santee mentioned the first amendment auditors noting the Police Department was meeting with downtown businesses to discuss best practices.

City Clerk Denise Jordan stated the Clerk's Office devotes a considerable amount of time to pre and post meeting tasks as well as records management. Accomplishments for the year included completing (1) the redistricting process to rebalance the population based upon the 2020 census data; (2) Phase 2 of the courtroom upgrade which resulted in the installation of the podium, staff tables and a document camera; and (3) the agenda management software upgrade. Mrs. Jordan commented on the following initiatives noting they were also challenging:

- Records Management: This is an ongoing challenge because of the volume of records to maintain. Efforts are underway to initiate a software program to manage board/committee information. Currently everything is a manual process. The software is expected to improve efficiency associated with these duties.
- November 2023 Election: Six seats will be addressed. Preparation began in December. There was conversation about the street list maintenance process being labor intensive which was challenging when coupled with other deadlines and core duties.

FINANCE:

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry presented a financial update. The following details were noted:

- LOST collections began four months earlier than expected.
- Permit and Zoning collections had two years of accelerated revenue. Projections anticipate a decrease for FY2024.
- General Fund Operating Revenues for 2019-2022 were impacted by the new fire fund, COVID and Cares Act funds.

Regarding accomplishments, Mr. Perry mentioned the distinguished budget award, Georgia Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Triple Crown winners and bond rating improvements. Challenges were noted as follows:

- Selling business licenses through the new software is requiring some rewrites to address software glitches.
- Georgia Fund 1 investments created an environment where advisors are competing against each other.
- The hiring process is a challenge because of the different workforce climate.

In regards to initiatives, GASB Statement No. 96 will implement protocols pertaining to Subscription Based Information Technology Arrangements (SBITAs). Also, updated policies and procedures will be presented soon.

Comments:

- *There was confirmation that the Fire and Police funds will eventually stop being subsidized by the General Fund.*

FIRE:

Fire Chief Brandon Ellis commented on the community being the department's biggest asset. Accomplishments included implementing a community-first approach, providing superior service, community education/engagement, evolving training, additional preemption intersections, an e-bike for the Greenway/wooded trail and renewed partnership with the Police Department regarding community outreach. There was discussion about challenges/opportunities associated with growth, employee retention and supply chain issues which included discussion about how to address them. Department initiatives include providing the highest level of service, active safety education, retention and recruitment.

Comments/Discussion/Questions:

- *Do employees sign training reimbursement contracts?*
- *How does the Employee Referral Program work?*
- *There was discussion about preemption devices on county vehicles.*
- *What can be done to help with retention?*
- *What is the current staffing level? Are there any vacancies?*

Recess: 10:21 AM

Reconvene: 10:45 AM

COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER:

Community Service Center Director Phillippa Lewis Moss presented the following accomplishments:

- The Meals on Wheels Program served 15,795 meals and distributed 6,000 pounds of donated pet food.
- The Senior Program experienced increased participation after lowering the age requirement and relaunching the Senior Travel Program to attract younger retirees.
- Purchased assistive devices using ARPA funds.
- Community Outreach is ongoing with CommUNITY Conversations.
- WeGo's demand exceeds supply.
- The Gainesville Trolley Service was a huge success.

Challenges included the impact of inflation and the expansion from a small urban to transportation management area (TMA). The TMA designation happened quickly and includes parts of Jackson and Forsyth counties which is expected to create some confusion.

In regards to initiatives, there's a desire to enhance transit services by increasing the WeGo fleet size and improving on-time performance. There's an opportunity to partner with a Commute Enterprise Project which is essentially a carpool program. There's enough interest to offer WeGo weekend service for 1/2 the day on Saturday. Funding was received to purchase two additional trolleys creating an opportunity to offer this service in other parts of the community. Mrs. Moss mentioned there are some prerequisites for transitioning the fleet to a zero/low emission plan.

Comments/Discussion/Questions:

- *There were compliments about the success of WeGo and the trolleys with appreciation for determining options to expand both.*

NOTE: Council Member Wangemann left at 10:53 AM

CHATTAHOOCHEE GOLF COURSE:

Golf Director Rodger Hogan presented accomplishments noting it was a year of records. They're adding new players to the database (on average 20 to 25 per week). Revenues increased some due to increased rates and some due to increased rounds. There was a record high in junior league participation with 44 junior golfers. Basement renovation created opportunities for utilizing the space effectively. The Women's National Championship was a great event. It was planned in 5 months which is a shorter period of time compared to the normal planning process.

Staffing, equipment and parking were noted as challenges.

The '23 GPGA Junior championship scheduled for June 5-7 will have a huge impact on hotel occupancy. It was noted this event has never been played at a public facility.

Initiatives included but were not limited to a range tee expansion, underbrush removal, range net installation, upgrade credit card terminals, upgrade phone system and upgrade the website flyover video.

Comments:

- *The change in the type of grass allowed the increased rounds.*
- *Not having an agreement with the Country Club creates even play for all.*
- *Suggestions were offered to improve the t-boxes.*

Recess: 11:24 AM

Reconvene: 12:20 PM

Note: Council Member Clay did not return.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

Administrative Services Director Janeann Allison began by addressing the Human Resources Division accomplishments, challenges and initiatives. In regards to accomplishments, the addition of a talent recruitment manager, the employee referral program and billboards promoting career

opportunities have been tremendously beneficial to the hiring process. It was noted that 89 referrals were received resulting in 43 new employees.

Recruitment with specific emphasis on starting salaries, retention and benefits were noted as challenges. Mrs. Allison stated employee expectations have changed. There are new federal regulations regarding specialty prescription drugs. And, there's an opportunity to promote supplement retirement savings.

Initiatives will focus on work-based learning, retention and the Clinic. Mrs. Allison shared a statement from a Work-Based Learning Program participant describing it as a rewarding experience with an opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about the job. Human Resources will partner with the University of North Georgia to complete a research project designed to identify areas for improvement when it comes to recruitment, learning development and motivation/wellbeing. Quarterly appreciation events are planned in response to a survey indicating employees felt unappreciated. Finally, the clinic will be renovated (with assistance from partners) and will start addressing mental health.

Mrs. Allison presented accomplishments from Municipal Court starting with Law Day 2022. This event focused on voting rights, the importance of voting and exposed students to voting equipment. Other accomplishments included strengthening court operations and accountability audits. In regards to challenges and opportunities, the division is working to mitigate two risks identified during a Vendor Risk Assessment and will work on behavioral health realizing court is an effective tool for diverting people with disorders from the criminal system. The initiatives for Municipal Court include implementing parking ticket technology and updating the Georgia Crime Information System to ensure criminal histories are correct.

NOTE: Council Member Clay returned at 12:43 PM.

Mrs. Allison presented accomplishments from the Information Technology Division starting with the Digital Cities Survey Top 10 Award followed by cybersecurity improvements and ending with customer service statistics. Cybersecurity threats continue to be a challenge along with supply chain issues which effect the ability to provide timely service. There is also a challenge related to the growing demand on technology. Initiatives for the division focus on continued security improvements and staff development.

Comments:

- *Employee pay and compression will not be easy to address.*

PARKS & RECREATION:

Parks and Recreation Director Kate Mattison shared accomplishments by category starting with capital projects. Nine projects were mentioned with emphasis on the groundbreaking at The Coop, the Underground Fit Zone, Pickleball Courts and the Kayak Shack. In regards to operations, the master plan has been implemented and the department won seven awards at the Georgia Recreation and Parks Association Annual Conference. In regards to programming, community support of Wilshire Wonderland and the Underground FitZone were discussed.

There are challenges associated with the timing of capital projects, catching up on maintenance related issues and staffing with emphasis on the fact that 30% of the staff is eligible for retirement. Mrs. Mattison also highlighted a few major capital initiatives. There was discussion about the

Midland Greenway improvements to add shaded areas. There was also discussion about improvements at the Martha Hope Cabin. Initiatives included realigning partnerships and focusing of programming. Mrs. Mattison concluded by briefly reviewing the FY24-FY28 Major Capital Improvement Plan

Comments:

- *There was an inquiry about revenues at the kayak shack.*
- *Neighborhood input was suggested in regards to the changes at the Martha Hope Cabin.*
- *Retractable shading was suggested on the Midland Greenway.*

NOTE: Chris Rotalsky and Matt Tarver joined the meeting.

RECAP & DISCUSSION

T-SPLOST

City Manager Bryan Lackey stated Hall County is on an accelerated schedule to address T-SPLOST noting all cities are involved. Staff has been working to prepare for this.

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard stated the projects are important in two ways, i.e., their impact to improving traffic and their ability to gain voter support. She shared general information regarding statewide usage and discussed the timeline noting small group discussions are already underway. She expressed the importance of focusing on projects that can be completed in five years indicating staff compiled a list of 47 potential projects for consideration. There was discussion about the following large projects:

1. Park Hill: Riverside Drive, Park Hill at Oak Tree Drive and Park Hill at South Enota.
2. Ridge Connector: East Ridge, West Ridge, Limestone Parkway Extension, Downey Boulevard Extension as well as a parallel connector alleviating Jesse Jewell and I-985.
3. Skelton/Hilton Connector: Improve connections from Shallowford Road to Browns Bridge Road and Browns Bridge Road to Atlanta Highway.

Mrs. Sheppard presented other projects by category.

- **Connectivity:** Projects that widen, extend or realign roadways to improve traffic flow (Ridge Road Connector, Hilton Connector and Green Hill Circle Connector).
- **Intersection Improvements:** Projects that address congestion.
- **Pedestrian Improvements:** Improving pedestrian movement in and around the City (Park to Park Neighborhood sidewalks, Athens Street Sidewalks and the Highlands to Islands Trailhead).
- **Study:** Projects that require evaluation and approval from State and/or Federal entities (Downey Connector Interchange, Park Hill Pedestrian Connection and Green Street/City Park Pedestrian Connection).

Mrs. Sheppard discussed hiring a consultant to develop a 5-year revenue projection.

Mr. Lackey shared potential revenue allocations based upon population and shared details from preliminary discussions.

Comments/Discussion:

- *An inquiry about advertising on the pedestrian bridge indicated GDOT is resistant from a public safety perspective.*
- *The City is limited to educating the community on T-SPLOST. The Chamber will be responsible for advocating for it.*
- *Including Athens Street sidewalks will be crucial to securing southside support.*
- *There was an inquiry about the alleyway project.*
- *Compliments were extended to past elected officials for visionary actions.*

ADJOURNMENT: 2:54 PM

/dj

W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk