

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

OFFICIALS PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: George Wangemann

OTHERS PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Angela Sheppard, Jeremy Perry, Chris Rotalsky, Myron Bennett, Amy Bennett, Rusty Ligon, Linda MacGregor, Chris Hamilton, Angela Sheppard, Robyn Lynch, Jay Parrish, Denise Jordan

Mayor Couvillon called the meeting to order and served as the presiding officer.

## **PUBLIC WORKS:**

### **TSPLOST**

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky presented information about TSPLOST indicating the options are a 1% tax with an intergovernmental agreement executed by Hall County and all municipalities, or a .75% tax without the intergovernmental agreement. A countywide referendum is required to approve a five-year TSPLOST. Gainesville's priorities are intersection improvements, sidewalks/pedestrian improvements, construction/extension/realignment projects, study/plan/design project and Georgia Department of Transportation authorized projects. Summaries of the following were presented:

- Large projects, i.e., Park Hill improvements, Ridge Connector Improvements and the Hilton Connector
- Discretionary projects, i.e., Green Hill Circle Connector, Memorial Park Drive/Old Flowery Branch Road Intersection and Pedestrian Improvements
- Study Projects, i.e., Downey Connector Interchange, Green Street and Park Hill Connectivity

The tax collection was anticipated to be \$325 million. There was discussion about Gainesville's projected allocation, i.e., \$77 million projection for large projects and \$19.5 million for the jurisdictional allocation.

### *Comments:*

- *Will the hospital be an advocate for improvements in the Downey Boulevard area?*
- *There was a desire for the East Ridge Connector to have priority with attention to Downey Boulevard and Oaktree Drive.*
- *There was a desire to address the Oaktree Corridor and to improve traffic flow on secondary streets.*
- *It was suggested that the Joint Municipal Association reconvene to help with TSPLOST, Service Delivery Strategy and similar projects effecting all municipalities.*
- *There was a request for talking points to assist with future TSPLOST discussions.*

## **COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

### **Highlands to Islands Trail East/West Connector Update**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon displayed the connector's path noting streetscaping on Athens Street is under contract. Construction work will be noticeable in 2025.

*Comments:*

*There was a desire for the city to consider purchasing the Folkley property.*

**Liberty Station Project**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon stated this project will move forward as a rezoning request.

**Gainesville Waste and Recycling (GWAR) Property Swap**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon summarized action regarding the city's vision. Multiple relocation sites have been evaluated.

**Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) Update**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon stated staff will be working with the consultant for the next ULDC update with anticipated completion by March 2024.

**Campus Improvements**

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard discussed several projects that improve connectivity through Roosevelt Square infusing an iconic interactive public art component. A committee worked to develop a plan and worked with a consultant to design art that connects downtown to Lake Lanier Olympic Park.

Mrs. Sheppard discussed and displayed renderings of improvements to the area around the Brenau University sign. Brenau agreed to share the cost for a new sign and for landscaping. The City will address the stone wall and lighting.

Mrs. Sheppard proposed improvements to the Administration Building Plaza that make it more open, refreshes the landscaping and creates a welcoming space. The rendering displayed a two-tier design with a stack stone wall that provides continuity with the pattern of the wall at Brenau.

*Comments:*

*The installation of a full color HD sign could lead to updating the ULDC to allow color signage throughout the city.*

**Restaurants & Plaza Updates**

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard discussed the design which revealed brands at the new parking deck plaza, a water feature, an urban/casual feel, public art, unique lighting, specialty pavers, roll up doors and more. Construction documents are in progress. The project schedule anticipates final completion in fall 2024.

**Alley Master Plan**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon stated discussions began a few years ago to make improvements to the downtown alleyways. An Alley Master Plan was developed. Stakeholder interviews were conducted to gauge interest. There was positive feedback. The plan is to close the alleys to traffic and provide loading zones. Common features include exterior lighting, dumpster screening, thermoplastic flooring and planter benches/seating. Each alley would have a theme. Concepts were presented for the four alleys described as follows:

1. Eastside Alley located behind Downtown Drafts and Avocados
2. Maple Street Alley located behind Tap It
3. Main Street Alley located behind Atlas Pizza and Martin Furniture
4. Brenau Avenue Alley located on the back side of Yellowfin, Recess and Consuelo

If inclined to proceed, the next step is to secure buy-in from stakeholders and determine their level of partnership.

*Comments:*

*Simultaneous work on all alleys was suggested.*

**Recess: 11:45 AM**

**Reconvene: 12:58 PM**

Note: George Wangemann joined the meeting via cell phone.

**POLICE**

Chief Jay Parrish discussed accomplishments. Significant savings occurred directly related to changing the hiring/staffing process for a certified officer. There was discussion about the changes noting these officers receive more training hours at a lower cost. Chief Parrish also shared the Mental Health Co-Responder Program is categorizing data that identifies patterns in regards to referrals, clinical case management, jail project and homeless project. There is a need to expand this program.

Chief Parrish stated the department's challenges and opportunities were linked to downtown parking. He commented on the installation of the Sentry Safety Sticks in February 2023. In less than three weeks, over 300 violations occurred in the loading zones. This resulted in an idea to identify loading zones differently. He also commented on the Downtown Ambassador Program initiated to provide more police presence. Call boxes and camera systems were installed in the south parking deck.

Chief Parrish expressed a desire to install metal screening panels at the parking decks (designed to match the city branding) during FY2024. This is a safety feature that discourages inappropriate behavior in the parking deck.

Chief Parrish reported the meeting with the downtown merchants presented the following concerns/complaints: two-hour parking on surface streets, availability and/or location of handicap spaces and enforcement/technology/aesthetics. Research determined parking kiosk are the current trend with a wide variety of options. He requested guidance on how to proceed.

*Comments:*

- *Consider a comprehensive review of the downtown area.*
- *Consider transitioning downtown to a plaza that eliminates parking.*
- *Public education will be critical.*
- *Secure more details about parking mobile apps, prepare an RFP and be prepared to community pushback.*

Note: City Attorney Abby Hayes joined the meeting at 1:27 PM.

**WATER RESOURCES:**

Department of Water Resources Director Linda MacGregor stated the presentation will include a business update, project updates and stormwater. Information regarding litigation, pretreatment and system upgrades would be discussed upon inquiry.

### **Business Update**

Finance and Administration Division Manager Amy Bennett stated the last two years generated more customers and more revenue. She called attention to significant water conservation efforts since 2006 noting there was a small increase in water usage despite the addition of 18,000 customers.

### **Project Updates**

Deputy Director of Water Resources Myron Bennett presented information about Gainesville 85 Business Park, Flat Creek WRF Rebuilding, utility relocations in conjunction with Department of Transportation Projects and sewer service expansions.

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor discussed capital project funding with a brief discussion about potential future loans.

### **Stormwater**

Director of Water Resources Linda MacGregor briefly discussed different types of stormwater issues. She generally stated financial responsibility for problems on private property lie with the property owner. She also stated privately owned/maintained stormwater matters encompass over 13,000 storm water structures, 170+ miles of storm pipes and 450+ ponds. Ms. MacGregor displayed the five-year history of actual operating expenses devoted to stormwater then discussed possible funding sources. She presented a summary of action taken by other communities (Athens, Gwinnett and Roswell). There was discussion about the options for additional revenue including but not limited to loans and additional tax. It was noted there is no perfect solution.

City Manager Bryan Lackey suggested authorizing staff to research a Municipal Option Sales Tax (MOST) that allows MS4 systems to participate with a report of the findings in the fall.

City Attorney Abb Hayes shared his legal opinion about addressing stormwater issues on a case by case basis.

### *Comments/Questions*

- *Is the Council committed to addressing this issue? If yes, there was a desire to secure a loan to start addressing these issues and establish the protocol for a long-term solution.*
- *Will this require a tax increase?*
- *Can this be a county wide collaboration?*
- *There needs to be a funding source, possibly an additional fee structure.*
- *There needs to be an evaluation process to qualify for stormwater assistance, possibly with homeowner participation.*
- *How much money would be generated if the lifeline rate was discontinued?*
- *What are the funding options?*

**Recess: 3:05 PM**

**Reconvene: 3:25 PM**

Note: Jay Parrish and Abb Hayes did not return.

### **CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU:**

Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Robyn Lynch commented on the need for another hotel and reported a Hotel Market Analysis indicated Gainesville could use 2 to 3 additional hotels categorized as upper midscale class hotels. She named viable brands and the best locations.

Ms. Lynch presented updates on the following projects: Historic City Hall Project, Riverwalk Project, the Boathouse Project and Green Street Park.

In terms of visioning for the future, Ms. Lynch suggested adding Thompson Bridge Park to the park system and discussed improvement options. There has been conversation with the Corp of Engineers to determine their level of interest/support. The vision included a kayak area, a kayak shack and recreational fields with areas for food trucks and picnic pavilions. She discussed a sport opportunity that would be unique to this region and discussed the timeline for a masterplan that included the Corp of Engineers review. The city can develop a plan to maintain the park during the review process.

Ms. Lynch presented the Queen City Barge as another vision for the future. She discussed its amenities and the option for moving among nine locations.

#### *Comments:*

- *There may be some pushback from Thompson Bridge Park neighborhood.*
- *There was a desire to see the Queen City Barge at Holly Park.*
- *Moving the barge would not be easy. It may need to stay in one location.*

### **FINANCE:**

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry presented a budget request from the District Attorney to staff an assistant district attorney position due to heavy case load. This would not be a city employee. This would be similar to an agency allocation if approved.

Mr. Perry presented the financial report. The following information was noted:

- Departments are doing a great job spending SPLOST VIII revenue.
- Hotel/motel revenues are trending.
- The anticipated millage rate would include a roll back for 2024.
- The Homeowner's Tax Relief Credit signed by the governor creates a slight change in tax bills as the ARPA credit is discontinued.

City Manager Bryan Lackey presented employee compensation information.

#### *Comments:*

- *There was a concern about other constitutional officers making similar requests if the District Attorney's request was approved.*

### **ADJOURNMENT: 4:00 PM**

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W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

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Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk