

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Sam Couvillon, Barbara Brooks, Zack Thompson, Juli Hayes, Danny Dunagan
VACANT POSITION: Ward 4
STAFF PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Jeremy Perry, Kevin Hutcheson, Brenda Carpio, Denise Jordan
STAFF ABSENT: Angela Sheppard

Mayor Sam Couvillon called the meeting to order at 9:11 AM.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES:

Administrative Services Director Janeann Allison began with a video of employees thanking the governing body for the pay increase. She discussed creative ways to retain employees noting the Work-Based Learning Program and North Georgia Works Program have been successful options.

In regards to accomplishments, the Retirement Plan A portal is available to employees as a planning tool. GMA will offer a similar product for Retirement Plan B by the end of the year.

Recruitment and retention were named as the biggest challenges facing the department. Insurance premiums were also a challenge with rate increases above 20%.

Mrs. Allison shared details about a few initiatives. The 2-day, 2-week, 2-month initiative will gage situations, build trust, develop clear chains of communication and boost motivation in a diverse workforce containing four generations. Stay interviews will capture information at various times during employment instead of capturing post-employment comments. The Hiring Manager training and the GET Program will be launched soon. Property valuations will be reviewed to ensure adequate insurance coverage. And, the Equipment Rodeo will highlight the importance of safe driving while challenging employees to improve skills in a fun way.

Council Comments

- *There were inquiries regarding the differences between the original and the current Retirement Plan A benefits.*

Municipal Court Division

Administrative Services Director Janeann Allison complimented the division for receiving a Clearance Rate Excellence Award acknowledging improvements to the administration of justice in Georgia Courts through collaboration, innovation and information. She also commented on the installation of SafetySticks technology as a downtown parking enforcement effort.

Municipal Court is facing recidivism challenges. Efforts are underway for reducing this problem. Mrs. Allison shared an experience where United Way helped return an individual to family in another state and stayed connected to ensure proper assistance was received.

In regards to initiatives, the court system is considering technology to improve the check-in process and to enhance communication via digital signage.

Information Technology Division

Interim Directors Chris Sudderth and Chad Racine presented accomplishments, challenges and initiatives. There was focus on remaining in the Digital Cities Survey Top 10 with a goal of ranking number one. The division worked with Water Resources on the Supervisory Control and Data

Acquisition (SCADA) Project. And, the division continues to provide a high level of customer service addressing calls for assistance, proactive maintenance and other related matters.

An ongoing challenge is protecting the city against cyber security threats. These threats coupled with increasing prices are shifting the landscape to more cloud-based resources. Also, the department is actively working to protect private information against machine learning and artificial intelligence.

In regards to initiatives, fiber maintenance is a point of focus to reduce the risk of future fiber cuts. Intentional improvement to learn new technologies is an ongoing initiative. Discussion is underway about transitioning to Microsoft 365.

Council Comments

- *Upon inquiry about the IT Director position, City Manager Bryan Lackey provided an update.*

FINANCE

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry commented on inquiries from other governmental entities asking how Gainesville established a low millage rate last year and inquiring about the creative use of ARPA funds. He shared some financial information and called attention to extra LOST revenue in 2023 which was consistent across the state.

The annual budget books were mentioned as an accomplishment noting Gainesville is the only Georgia recipient of the National Strategic Planning Budget Award.

The department is transitioning to a new business license software (Accela). There have been some challenges. A consultant was hired to provide assistance. Another challenge has been increased check fraud. The department plans to transition to ACH processing.

In regards to initiatives, the department plans to recall revenue bonds to save between \$500K to \$700K.

FIRE

Fire Chief Brandon Ellis commented on reviewing the call history to restructure the response delivery plan thus reducing fuel and maintenance cost. He also increased the advancement standards to improve firefighter knowledge.

The city's growth rate is placing a strain on services. Efforts were underway to identify areas to address from an ISO perspective as a means of mitigation. Equipment, infrastructure and mandates present other challenges. Electric Vehicles (EV) fires are on the rise and require significant resources leading to a very informative conversation.

In regards to initiatives, efforts were underway to be community centered through an ISO approach, expanding services through the hazmat & aircraft response team and implementing a nationally certified Youth Fire Setter Intervention Program.

RECESS: 10:41 AM
RECONVENE: 11:12 AM

CSC/WEGO

Community Service Center Director Phillippa Lewis Moss presented WeGo Service by the numbers indicating 288,170 miles were traveled the first six months of FY2024. The trolley service is doing well. Senior services received \$250K in ARPA grant funds to purchase assistive devices, food and other essentials. The most popular request was for an electric can opener. A considerable amount of time was dedicated to onboarding the Hall County Family Connections Director who has launched three initiatives. She also commented on a commitment to the Wisdom Project to work on a five-year strategic plan.

The biggest challenge for the department was addressing the demand for WeGo and the trolley. Next in line would be the increased demand for senior services and ADA services.

The department's initiatives include managing the demand on WeGo, purchasing the first hybrid vehicle, implementing a seatbelt requirement and continuing to be a Micro transit Ambassador.

Council Comments

- *There was an inquiry about seatbelts accommodating all sizes.*

GOLF

Director of Golf Rodger Hogan reported having a female on the team had been beneficial. In regards to accomplishments, the department increased junior participants and completed the range tee expansion which increased the lower tee capacity. Also, the course increased rounds by 13%.

The department anticipates challenges associated with hosting seven events in conjunction with increased play from Chestatee golfers while their course is closed for renovations.

Plans are underway to upgrade the chipping area around the lower putting green to create more practice space. There was discussion about installing a range tee line mat system on the upper and lower range tee with the potential for up to 30 hitting stations. Tree trimming and brush removal around the range net would be a priority. Other initiatives include upgrading the phone system in the clubhouse and additional rangers to monitor the pace of play.

PARKS & RECREATION

Deputy Directory Michael Graham announced the department is celebrating 100 years and some events were planned to commemorate this accomplishment. He discussed capital improvement accomplishments with specific mention of the pickleball courts. The citizen lead 2030 Master Plan is the road map that guided actions. The relationship with Gainesville school system is stronger. The department will seek its sixth reaccreditation during FY2025.

Capital project timing and catching up with maintenance in the midst of significant growth and parking were named as the primary challenges.

Succession planning presented opportunities for organizational realignment and new amenities presented opportunities for new programs.

Initiatives are a continuation of capital projects summarized in a handout. There was discussion about the need for a recreation center with emphasis on Gainesville being the only community in the country that doesn't have a facility. The department will be preparing for change with the opening of The Coop and the Midland improvements. In closing, Mr. Graham noted a balanced budget was adopted with 2/3 of the funding applied to personnel.

Council Comments

- *There was a request for the estimated completion date for Martha Hope Cabin parking which led to a discussion about damage to the detention pipes requiring rework.*
- *There was an inquiry about the dirt at Wessell.*
- *There was an inquiry about the long-range plans for Holly Park.*
- *The department was encouraged to coordinate with CVB when hosting sporting events.*

BREAK: 12:15 PM

RECONVENE: 12:25 PM

POLICE

Police Chief Jay Parrish stated accomplishments were linked to receiving the 10th CALEA Award, to the reorganization of the Explorer Program to train participants to become police officers and to the Citizen Public Safety Academy.

Overall, calls for service increased by 7%. It was noted service calls related to robberies, aggravated assaults and commercial burglaries had significantly decreased. There was discussion indicating overdoses in the city had slight to no change but deaths associated with overdoses had significantly decreased due to the availability of Naloxone. Shoplifting charges increased by 72%.

The department is averaging between 10 to 14% in police officer vacancies. Approximately 18% will be retirement eligible in the next 5 years. Qualified candidates are at an all-time low which is a national issue.

Police Department initiatives include establishing a crime center with all technology tied together to monitor in real time, assigning senior officers to recruitment events, partnering with state and federal law enforcement agencies to focus on Fentanyl, a Public Safety Training Center on Fulenwider Road and the Police Foundation.

Council Comments

- *Include Lacey Turner in the recruiting process.*
- *Present the Police Foundation at Chamber, Kiwanis and Rotary Club meetings.*

CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE:

City Clerk' Division

City Clerk Denise Jordan commented on a fiber cut incident occurring a few hours before a Council Meeting. She was proud of developing and implementing a plan on short notice that

provided a seamless meeting despite the fiber cut. She also commented on upgraded equipment, the expansion of digital messaging to the municipal courtroom, storage/seating improvements and the bulletin board upgrade. Other accomplishments included the implementation of a board/committee management solution with a centralized repository and public access to committee and appointment information, documentation of the 2023 election cycle in a one-page summary format and the creation of an electronic catalogue of deed/easement records.

The biggest challenge of the Clerk's Office is maintaining consistency and continuity. There was very little time for cross training and preparing standard operating procedures. Another challenge was tied to water incidents in archives which also created an opportunity to restore minute books dating back to the 1800s. The special election was also a challenge considering a condensed schedule and different voting locations.

In regards to initiatives, plans are underway to transition to an electronic contract management software solution by December 31, 2025. And, there is a desire to address street list maintenance on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Council Comments

- *There was an inquiry as to whether other Clerks have a similar workload.*

Public Relations

Public Relations Director Christina Santee presented CivicSend, a module that works in tandem with the Notify Me module from the website. A video outlined the steps. A test file was distributed giving participants a firsthand view of the product. Barring no concerns, the module was ready to use immediately.

City Manager

City Manager Bryan ended the retreat by discussing public input meetings regarding the Historic Gainesville Square scheduled for Thursday, March 14. There is a contract for the design work. Before moving forward, it would be a good idea to receive community input. The schedule was presented as follows.

ACTION	TIMELINE
NTP	February 5
Survey	1 month
Workshop	March 12-15
Schematic Design	March – May
Design Development	June – August
Construction Documents	September – November
Bidding	December
Construction	16 months

Council Comments

- *How will the project logo be used to avoid/minimize confusion with the city's official branding?*
- *There was an inquiry about budget/funding for the downtown square project.*

ADJOURNMENT: 1:46 PM

/dj

W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk