

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Zack Thompson, Barbara Brooks, Juli Hayes, Abigail Guzman, Danny Dunagan

OFFICIALS ABSENT: Sam Couvillon

STAFF PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Angela Sheppard, Jeremy Perry, Kevin Hutcheson, Brenda Carpio, Mickey Eyre, Christina Santee-Moss, Denise Jordan, Alisa Grayson

Mayor Pro Tem Thompson called the meeting to order at 9:18 AM.

CMO/CLERK/COMMUNICATIONS

City Manager Bryan Lackey stated FY2026 will be a year of transition with changes among the elected officials. He briefly commented on the budget process – a review of the vision, mission, values, goal development process and strategic priorities – noting throughout the day, each department will present accomplishments, challenges, opportunities and initiatives. The City Manager's Office was first on the agenda which included the City Clerk and Communication offices.

Notable accomplishments included the Administration Building upgrades, connectivity improvements that created a public plaza with interactive art (the Dragon), the Lakeshore Mall rezoning, the 2025 Milken Institute spotlight identifying Gainesville as the best-performing small metro city, completion of the CivicSend communication module, completion of the website redesign launching three new department header pages (Community & Economic Development, Water and Police), completion of the Code Rewrite Project and hosting several events.

Challenges include SPLOST IX on the November ballot, implementing the Athens Street Study, the Marler Street stormwater improvements, the Green Street Pool Project, Old Fire Station #2 and the Tax Allocation District application for the mall which will generate questions about the master plan for this area. Mr. Lackey asked the governing body to consider whether solid waste should be revisited and if any action should occur regarding the Northlake property.

City Clerk Denise Jordan reported an opportunity to host the Appalachian Leadership Institute. She also commented on the Hall County Election Board conducting a study regarding the impact of population growth on election operations noting municipalities may have an opportunity to participate. Mrs. Jordan presented the status of the following projects: Contract Life Cycle Management Solution, the Minute Book Restoration Project and the creation of the Clerk's Office Standard Operating Procedures.

Deputy Clerk Alisa Grayson presented consistency and continuity as a challenge considering the upcoming staff changes. Her initiatives included requiring all boards/committees to utilize the meeting management software for consistency and transparency purposes. She also commented on the regular scheduled election in November.

Council Comments:

- *Compliments about the website translator.*
- *Compliments from the community for simplifying the election process.*
- *Inquiry regarding the starting point, cost of concrete and time constraints associated with the Athens Street Study.*
- *Inquiry regarding the bill number for changing disclosure report filing from local to state filings.*

- *Supportive of Boards/Committees using the meeting management software solution to provide a central location for these records.*
- *Request to honor the management staff with community involvement.*

FINANCE

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry expressed pride with awards received from the Georgia Finance Officers Association and commented on the Gainesville Chicken Festival. He commented on the four GASB Statements implemented this budget year. While reviewing the General Fund Property Tax/TAVT Revenue chart, Mr. Perry stated a full property tax roll back is recommended for FY2026. He summarized the fluctuations in a few revenue charts. Gainesville's financial status was compared to four other municipalities in regards to property taxes, LOST and investment income. He commented on the savings associated with the recent bond issue noting this was a lot of work that generated a substantial amount of investment income. In closing, Mr. Perry commented on the success of the Midtown Tax Allocation District.

FIRE

Fire Chief Brandon Ellis expressed appreciation for the leadership and team work in Gainesville. Departmental accomplishments included focus on high service levels by integrating new technology to offer quicker response times. There was an increase in education events to bridge the gap with youth. A Hazmat Aircraft Response Policy was developed and procuring basic response equipment is underway.

Challenges include growth compared to funding with emphasis on increased equipment cost and one training facility serving 30,000 active firefighters lengthens the time to train firefighters. Unfunded state/federal mandates were also discussed which could be offset by establishing a Firefighters Foundation (similar to the Police Foundation). Chief Ellis expressed the need for a training facility noting the city has the ability to teach classes and could invite surrounding agencies to attend. He commented on a local ordinance and fee structure to mitigate hazardous situations associated with EV charging stations noting the City of Milton requires all EV charging stations to have an NFPA 701 Compliant EV fire blanket.

In regard to initiatives, the Fire Department will continue building relationships with community partners to plan for the future, increase the public safety footprint along Highway 129 by adding Station 5 which also fulfills a requirement established during the last ISO review. Chief Ellis stated the department also plans to build partnerships through training.

Council Comments

- *Inquired about emergency response coordinated with Hall County.*
- *Complimentary of the partnership concept through training.*
- *Elected officials understand the importance of public safety and believes this is a priority.*
- *Confirmed the internship with the high school is work-based learning.*

RECESS: 11:16 AM
RECONVENE: 11:27 AM

PARKS & RECREATION

Parks and Recreation Director Kate Mattison stated the grand opening for The Coop is scheduled for March 8 at 10 AM noting every field is already booked through June. A video of the 100 year anniversary celebration was displayed showcasing improvements to the Midland Park. Wessell Park improvements included increased parking, new restrooms and additional court lighting. Pickle Ball and Disc Golf was added at this park. The Martha Hope Cabin improvements included additional parking, fire pits, a new roof, fresh paint and new lighting. Innovative accomplishments included goats on the greenway, public art and adaptive programming. The culture of the department has improved in regards to staff retention, diversity and recognition programs. The department is five years into the ten year master plan with 86% of the projects underway.

Departmental challenges include prioritizing capital projects, growing pains from additional programs/facilities and succession planning to prepare for the retirement of three key administrative staff members in the next five years.

Mrs. Mattison discussed initiatives associated with Roper Park, Longwood Park, Aviation Park, planning for a recreation center to provide indoor programming space, planning for Holly Park by proceeding with an environmental assessment to determine what can happen at this park and operational changes to include increased staffing for The Coop.

Mrs. Mattison closed by displaying the budget at a glance.

Council Comments

- *Are there opportunities to partner with Brenau for beach volleyball?*
- *Confirmed a community discussion regarding Holly Park would be helpful.*
- *Inquired about sidewalk improvements.*

RECESS: 12:30 PM

RECONVENE: 12:45 PM

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Human Resources

Administrative Services Director Janeann Allison commented on increased benefits to address retention, the benefits road show to address questions, the Social Security Administration presentations, employee events, the skill development rodeo and the GET Program.

Challenges include the mental health of employees and insurance premium cost. There was hope that the tort reform legislation will stabilize insurance cost.

Initiatives include outreach to other communities, 2-2-2 check-ins with new employees, stay interviews, workplace safety and identifying ways to reduce insurance cost.

Municipal Court

Administrative Services Director Janeann Allison commented on celebrating Municipal Court Week, cross-departmental training and empowering growth. Challenges involved non-compliant taxi cabs, shoplifting charges under \$500, outreach at job fairs in other communities and outdated technology. There was excitement about "blessing packages" (toiletries released on an as needed

basis). Plans are underway to remodel the lobby with municipal court staff stationed at the windows. There are also plans for a new outside entrance from the judge's chambers.

Council Comments

- *Safety concerns associated with only one entrance for Council Members.*

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Chief Information Officer Russ Hilmandolar stated the departmental reorganization took six months to fully staff. He also shared statistics regarding customer service calls for assistance and commented on simultaneously managing 15-20 projects that average 90 days to complete.

Challenges involve staying current with software updates and addressing resource demands with specific mention of new facilities and upgrades. As for initiatives, the department plans to work on policies/procedures associated with cybersecurity, partner with departments to gain knowledge of what's on the horizon and employee development considering 75% of the team is new to their role at the city.

GOLF

Chattahoochee Golf Course Director Rodger Hogan stated the biggest accomplishment was the new golf cart fleet equipped with a GPS system. He thoroughly discussed some features and future upgrades of this cloud-based tracking program. He also stated an analysis of the impact of the golf course rate increase revealed reduced rounds and increased revenue (\$151,000+) noting both benefit the golf course. Other accomplishments involved hosting events, range mat replacement and range netting brush removal.

Mr. Hogan indicated there were challenges associated with short game area improvements and hosting the Women's Regional Championship.

Initiatives included upgrading the teaching center, upgrading the ball dispenser area, tree/brush removal to aesthetically improve the course and creation of a prioritized list of future improvements.

CSC/WEGO

Community Service Center Director Phillipa Lewis Moss discussed the success of the Gainesville Trolley, the growth of senior services, the growth of Meals on Wheels and the growth of WeGo. Community Trust Fund donations reached their highest since COVID.

Mrs. Moss indicated there will be challenges associated with the impact of an aging community and retention of team members.

Initiatives focused on expanding the trolley service, providing respite care services, senior transportation services and counseling services. She commented on plans to host a music extravaganza featuring local talent and additional online and in-person senior services.

RECESS: 1:54 pm
RECONVENE: 2:06 PM

POLICE

Police Chief Jay Parrish stated overdoses and overdose death related incidents decreased due to partnerships with State and Federal agencies. Staffing of the downtown precinct during business hours and downtown events as well as the establishment of Downtown/Midtown Enforcement were also accomplishments.

Departmental challenges include large crowds/gatherings and staffing changes at the Police Academy that reduced training opportunities. The biggest challenge for all agencies across the world will be data/digital storage and all things related to body cameras due to technology growth.

Initiatives involve addressing teen driving related issues and efforts to establish a real-time crime center

Council Comments

- *There was an inquiry about home security systems.*
- *Departmental collaborations were mentioned several times during the day.*
- *There was an inquiry about sworn officer vacancies.*

EXECUTIVE SESSION

City Manager Bryan Lackey requested an Executive Session to discuss real estate matters.

Motion to close the meeting to enter an Executive Session at 2:25 PM to discuss real estate matters.

Motion made by Council Member Dunagan

Motion seconded by Council Member Hayes

Votes favoring the motion: Thompson, Brooks, Hayes, Guzman, Dunagan

Absent: Couvillon

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Motion to close the Executive Session at 3:47 PM to reopen the meeting.

Motion made by Council Member Dunagan

Motion seconded by Council Member Hayes

Votes favoring the motion: Thompson, Brooks, Hayes, Guzman, Dunagan

Absent: Couvillon

OTHER DISCUSSION

Lighting the Chicken

City Manager Bryan Lackey reported a request to move the chicken from the current location. Staff is discussing the possibility of moving it to Roosevelt Square.

Next Retreat

Elected Officials were asked to provide feedback regarding the next retreat.

ADJOURNMENT: 3:59 PM

/dj

W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk