

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION  
*COUNCIL MEETING*

April 25, 2024

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, April 25, 2024 at 6:00 p.m., at the Lavonia Historic Train Depot at 1269 East Main Street, Lavonia, GA 30553. The meeting was hosted jointly by Franklin County and the City of Lavonia.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Vice-Chairman Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

Courtney Umbehant, Mayor of Lavonia, welcomed all in attendance to the City of Lavonia and expressed his gratitude for all the work that GMRC does that helps the city save money and run more proficiently without having to hire additional city staff. Mayor Umbehant introduced Lavonia City Councilman Jeremy Madden and the City of Lavonia staff that were present; Charles Cawthon, City Manager; Daniel Carson, Assistant City Manager; Barbara Busby, DDA Director; and Ashley Rose Dodd, Main Street Manager. From Franklin County the mayor introduced; Robert Franklin, Franklin County Commissioner; Terry Harris, County Manager; Robert Ogburn, Assistant County Manager/Planning & Zoning Director; and Tonya Powers, Franklin County IBA Director of Economic Development. Mr. Umbehant also introduced; Tonya Allen, City of Royston Clerk; Michael Crump, City of Royston DDA Director; Angela Whidby, Governor's Appointee to the GMRC Council; and Leslie McFarlin, Franklin County Private Sector Appointee to the GMRC Council.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Vice-Chairman Courtney Umbehant recognized special guests; Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Kathy Papa, Department of Community Affairs; and Luke Hetland, North Georgia Field Director for Lt. Governor Burt Jones.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

GMRC Council Chaplain Deborah Mack gave the devotion, invocation, and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Metz Catering.

PROGRAM

Mr. Taylor Worley with the Georgia Ports Authority gave an update on the Georgia Ports as well as an update on the Blue Ridge Connector (Inland Port).

A copy of the presentation can be found at <https://www.gmrc.ga.gov/gmrccouncil>.

## CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

GMRC Vice-Chairman Umbehant asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the March 28, 2024 Council meeting. Doug Wayne made a motion to approve the minutes as written and Jim Conley seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## REPORTS

### Chairman's Report

Vice-Chairman Umbehant did not have a report and turned his time over to Leslie McFarlin, Vice-President of Economic Development, North Georgia Technical College. Mrs. McFarlin stated that one of the aspects to her job that she is very excited about is helping facilitate the Adult Education Program at North Georgia Tech. The Adult Education Program assists adults in getting their GED as well as helping those that are not native English speakers. Mrs. McFarlin introduced Franklin County native Christie Campbell to share her story. Ms. Campbell was named as an Exceptional Adult Georgian in Literacy Education (EAGLE) student by North Georgia Technical College and was very appreciative of her experience and the education she received as part of the program. Ms. Campbell hopes to continue to further her education at North Georgia Tech.

### Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman reminded the Council that Georgia Mountains Regional Commission will be hosting a housing workshop on Wednesday, May 1<sup>st</sup> from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. at WorkSource Georgia Mountains, 1856 Thompson Bridge Rd., Gainesville, GA 30501. GMRC will be joined by Monica Callahan, Planning & Development Director for the City of Madison. Topics for the workshop will include identifying the pressures, needs, and outcomes for housing in your community

The Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC) will once again be hosting the annual Economic Development Conference at Lake Lanier Islands Resort on May 5-7, 2024. Sessions on Housing, updates from our Federal and State partners, and many other topics will all be highlighted during this conference.

Mrs. Feldman announced that the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' PlanFirst Program is now accepting nominations from interested communities. PlanFirst is DCA's program to recognize and reward communities that clearly demonstrate an established pattern of successfully implementing their local Comprehensive Plan. Nominations are due by May 15<sup>th</sup> and any community interested in applying may request the GMRC to write their application at no cost.

Senior Project Manager Laurin Yoder wrote and submitted a Homeland Security Grant application to GEMA on behalf of the Towns County Sheriff's Office. TCSO applied for

\$127,046 to purchase the necessary equipment and personal protective gear to equip its newly formed eight (8) member Critical Incident Response (or SWAT) Team.

Executive Director Feldman informed the Council that the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) is inviting its member governments to apply for Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funding. ARC is a partnership among thirteen states and the federal government providing financial investment and technical assistance to eligible applicants in support of community and economic development in Georgia's 37-county Appalachian region. **All 12 counties and 37 municipalities served by GMRC are eligible for this funding.** Applicants can apply for up to \$1,000,000 in ARC investment, and the required match can range from 30% to 70% depending on the county or counties where the project will take place. The next deadline for this funding will be July 2024.

Mrs. Feldman thanked the City of Gainesville Police Department for providing an introductory self-defense class for GMRC staff.

Mrs. Feldman also thanked GMRC's attorney, Kevin Tallant, for providing a lunch-and-learn on 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Audits.

#### Quarterly Finance Report

Council members received the FY24 Quarter 3 financial report prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director Alicia Page explained that the report was for the unaudited period ending March 31, 2024.

Mrs. Page went on to explain that as of the period end, the year-to-date revenues totaled \$3,847,339.27 of which:

- \$2,849,622.51 or approximately 74% are federal and state funding.
- \$465,465.15 or approximately 12% are member dues.
- \$445,959.34 or approximately 12% are charges for services.
- The remaining \$86,292.27 or 2% is from other revenues.

At the end of the period, expenditures totaled \$3,611,186.30. Total transfers and matching obligations for the period were \$238,586.98. Leaving a total surplus of \$236,152.97 for the period end.

Factors that contribute to this surplus include:

- \$26,796.84 in investment income from the Regional Commission's two revolving loan funds.
- The remaining surplus is due to recognized savings from higher interest earnings, and conservative spending to facilitate the RCs ongoing operational needs.

Vice-Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the quarterly finance report.

Denise McKay made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

## OLD BUSINESS

### FY25 Draft Budget

Finance Committee Chairman Bill Chafin explained that the FY25 Budget and Projected Work Scope Document was emailed to the Council on April 1, 2024, for review and questions. No questions from the Council were received. Mr. Chafin went on to present the budget highlights.

- This budget is being presented as a balanced budget and therefore the revenues equal the expenditures.
- The overall Revenues and Expenditures for the proposed FY25 budget are projected to be \$6,052,583.00.
- There is an overall decrease of about 9% from the adopted amended FY24 budget due to reductions in workforce development allocation funding and the expiration of additional 3<sup>rd</sup> year workforce development funding.
- The amount required to match grants and necessary transfers is \$567,346.
- This budget supports 29 positions agencywide, 27 full-time employees and two part-time employees.
- This budget contains a 3% cost of living raise effective July 1, 2024, for all regular full-time and part-time employees.
- Considering the amount of federal and state dollars to be received, the leveraging effect of local funds is significant. For every \$1.25 dollars paid in dues it is estimated the region will receive \$7.00 in federal and state funding.

Mr. Chafin shared that the Finance Committee has reviewed and recommends adoption of the FY25 Budget and Projected Work Scope.

Vice-Chairman Umbellant asked for a motion to adopt the FY25 Budget. Bill Chafin made the motion and Angela Whidby seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## NEW BUSINESS

### Audit Services RFP (FY24 to FY28)

Finance Committee Chairman Bill Chafin reported that on February 6, 2024, the GMRC staff issued a Request for Proposal for Audit Services for the Fiscal Years 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028. Proposal responses were due to the GMRC by 2:00 p.m. EST on March 22, 2024. Three proposals were received by GMRC from the following accounting firms:

1. CKH CPAs & Advisors, LLC.
2. Mauldin & Jenkins CPA & Advisors
3. Rushton

The proposals were sent to the Finance Committee members for their review and bid evaluations on April 2, 2024. Staff completed a thorough review of all submissions and recommend the approval of Ruston to perform auditing services for FY24 through FY28.

Vice-Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve Rushton to perform auditing services for FY24 through FY28. Bill Chafin made the motion and Angela Whidby seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Travel Policy Update

Executive Director Feldman explained that the GMRC Travel Policy was last updated in 2022. A review of the policy indicated a need to update a few areas. A draft of the updated policy was sent to all members prior to the meeting. Mrs. Feldman went over the major changes.

**Page 5:** Removed “all single expenditures of \$25 or greater”

**Page 6:** Section 1.1 – removed references to contracted airfare  
Section 1.2 – updated language on nonrefundable fares and documentation of lowest fares at time of booking.

**Page 10:** Section 2.3 – added language regarding the use of personally owned vehicles

**Page 12:** Section 3.1 – added language regarding prohibition of lodging through a non-commercial facility such as Airbnb, Vrbo, etc.

**Page 15:** Section 4.4 – removed conflicting language regarding per diems for in-state travel.

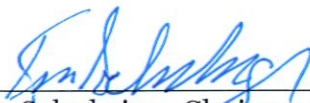
**Page 24:** Section 7.7 – updated language on provisions for non-GMRC individuals and authorized costs for travel.


Vice-Chairman Umbehant asked for a motion to approve the updated Travel Policy. Jim Conley made the motion and Doug Wayne seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ken Schubring, Chairman

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bruce Palmer, Secretary

GMRC COUNCIL  
ATTENDANCE SHEET  
2023-2024

COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	March 24	April 24	May 24	June 24
BANKS	Chris Ausburn	P	(R)	A	(R)	P	P	P	P	A	(R)		
	Sandra Garrison	(P)	P	A	A	P	P	P	P	P	P		
	Vicki Boling Jones	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P		
	Billy Thurmond	P	A	P	P	P	A	A	P	A	E		
DAWSON	John Walden	(P)	P	P	A	A	P	N-A	P	P	(P)		
	Kevin Herritt	A	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	A		
	Robert Franklin	P	A	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	P		
	Courtney Umbehant**	P	P	P	P	(P)	P	P	P	P	P		
FRANKLIN	Leslie McFarlin	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	A	P		
	Bruce Palmer***	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	E		
	Ray McAllister	P	P	A	A	V	V	N-P	P	A	P		
	Ken Schubring*	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	A		
HALL	Richard Higgins	A	A	A	A	R	A	E	A	E	E		
	Sam Couvillon	P	P	P	P	P	A	N-A	P	P	P		
	Deborah Mack	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P	P	P		
	Jeff Brown	A	P	A	A	P	A	A	A	(P)	P		
HART	Dan Leard	P	P	A	A	P	A	P	P	A	A		
	Bill Chafin	P	P	P	P	P	P	A	P	P	P		
	Chris Dockery	(R)	(R)	A	P	R	R	P	A	(R)	E		
	JoAnne Taylor	P	A	A	P	P	A	E	P	P	E		
LUMPKIN	Amy Booker	N	A	P	A	A	P	P	A	A	E		

**GMRC COUNCIL  
ATTENDANCE SHEET  
2023-2024**

COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	March 24	April 24	May 24	June 24
RABUN	Kent Woerner	(R)	A	A	(R)	(R)	A	A	(R)	A	E		
	Stacy Fountain	P	P	P	A	A	P	A	A	N-P	P		
	Douglas Wayne	P	P	A	P	P	P	A	P	P	P		
	Tara Simmons	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	E	P	E		
STEPHENS	Ron Matheson	P	P	(R)	A	A	A	V	P	P	(R)		
	James Addison	P	E	P	P	P	P	P	E	E	E		
	Cliff Bradshaw	P	P	P	(P)	(P)	P	P	(P)	P	(P)		
	Andrea Gibby	P	(R)	(R)	A	A	A	N-E	(R)	P	(R)		
UNION	Denise McKay	R	P	P	P	P	A	(R)	P	P	P		
	Lamar Paris	P	P	A	P	A	P	P	P	P	E		
	Jim Conley	P	P	(P)	P	P	P	E	P	P	P		
	Mitch Griggs	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
WHITE	Travis Turner	(P)	(P)	P	(P)	A	P	(P)	A	A	(P)		
	Nan Bowen	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
	Susan Cremering	A	P	P	P	A	P	A	P	P	P		
	Kim Waters	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	N-P	P	A		
GOV APPT.	Angela Whidby	P	A	P	P	A	P	P	P	(R)	P		
	VACANT	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V		
	VACANT	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V		
SPEAKER APPT.	VACANT	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V		
	VACANT	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V		

P = PRESENT    A = ABSENT    (R) = REPRESENTED    (P) PROXY VOTE    V = VACANCY    E = EXCUSED    N = NEW MEMBER    X = NO MEETING

\* Chairman  
\*\* Vice Chairman  
\*\*\* Secretary