

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION COUNCIL MEETING

January 30, 2025

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, January 30, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. at the Hall County Government Center located at 2875 Browns Bridge Rd., Gainesville, Georgia 30504. The meeting was hosted by Hall County.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Chairman Ken Schubring called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and thanked those in attendance for coming.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

Hall County Administrator Zach Propes welcomed those in attendance and thanked GMRC for the work they do throughout the region. Mr. Propes introduced the newly elected Hall County BOC Chairman, David Gibbs, as well as Commissioners Billy Powell and Jeff Stowe. Mr. Propes also introduced Planning Commissioner Stan Hunt.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Vice-Chairman Courtney Umbehant recognized special guests Mike Fisher, WGI; Kathy Papa, Georgia Department of Community Affairs; Brent Williams, ACCG; and Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/DINNER

GMRC Council member Jim Conley gave an invocation and followed with the Pledge of Allegiance. Dinner was catered by Amanda's Farm to Fork.

PROGRAM

Mr. John Shackelford, Eagle Ranch Executive Director, provided a program overview.

Please visit <https://www.gmrc.ga.gov/gmrccouncil> for the short video that Mr. Shackelford shared about Eagle Ranch.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

GMRC Secretary Cliff Bradshaw asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the December 6, 2024 Council meeting. Billy Thurmond made a motion to approve the minutes as written and Doug Wayne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

Chairman Ken Schubring did not have a report and yielded his time to Executive Director Feldman.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Heather Feldman thanked Mr. Jim Conley for all he has done in his 22 – 23 years on the GMRC Council. Mayor Conley is retiring in February and will be replaced by Mayor Pro Tem, Buddy Moore, on the GMRC Council.

Mrs. Feldman was excited to welcome the newest members to the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Council: David Gibbs; Hall County Chairman; Cory Pulliam, Franklin County Commissioner; Harold Collins, Union County Sole Commissioner; and Jimmy Tench, Habersham County Chairman.

Executive Director Feldman briefly addressed the federal funding freeze that was rescinded noting that about 80% of the GMRC funding is from federal sources. GMRC will be monitoring the situation closely and share any pertinent information that may be received.

The U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) has been reauthorized by Congress for the first time in 20 years. On January 4, 2025, the *Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024 (S. 4367)* was signed into law, following its passage in the House and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support. This reauthorization of the EDA will strengthen and protect EDA's programs and will enhance the initiatives that are of paramount importance to Economic Development Districts across the country.

Executive Director Feldman reported that the 2025 National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) and the Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) conference is being held in Arlington, Virginia March 9th through the 12th. The GMRC Chairman and Vice-Chairman, along with the Economic Development Team will be attending. GMRC Information Services Director Faith Bryan will be presenting at the conference on Georgia's REVAMP project.

Mrs. Feldman congratulated the City of Cornelia who had been selected to receive \$1,149,600 in funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation – Federal Railroad Administration Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program. The City of Cornelia will use these funds to install a pedestrian bridge over the pedestrian railroad crossing located at the big red apple and will ensure safety for attendees getting to and from the city's new amphitheater. GMRC Project Manager Maggie Smith assisted the city with the application, and this was the first one of these grants written by GMRC.

Executive Director Feldman introduced and welcomed Jesus Rubio who has recently started working with U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock as the Northeast Georgia Outreach Representative, replacing Katrina Cochran in the role. Gina Kessler and Heather Feldman met with Jesus Rubio and Salik Sohani, Director of Outreach, earlier in the month to share about the GMRC priorities and services. Mr. Sohani addressed the council, advising them that he and Mr. Rubio will be their points of contact when contacting Senator Warnock's office. Mr. Sohani also briefly discussed the freeze on federal funding. They will share information as they receive it and are a resource to all communities in the region.

Executive Director Heather Feldman announced that the Atlanta office of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) has a new Regional Director. After 30+ years, Phil Paradise retired at the end of December. His successor is Ms. Sheba Person-Whitley. Ms. Whitley is a North Carolina native but has up until this appointment been serving as the Regional Director for EDA in the Seattle office. GMRC is working to schedule a time to meet with Ms. Whitley.

GMRC has been busy facilitating strategic planning retreats for our member governments. In early January, GMRC staff facilitated retreats for the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority and the City of Clarkesville's Main Street Authority. On January 31st, staff will facilitate the City of Lavonia's Annual Strategic Planning retreat. In February, staff will facilitate the City of Dawsonville, City of Carnesville, and Habersham County's Strategic Planning retreats. Please contact Heather Feldman if you are looking for a facilitator for your retreat.

The next quarterly meeting for the Region 2 City and County Manager meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 12, 2025 beginning at 10:00 a.m. and will be hosted by the City of Dawsonville.

WorkSource Georgia Mountains Update

WorkSource Georgia Mountains Director Whitney Blair provided a department update that can be found at <https://www.gmrc.ga.gov/gmrccouncil>.

Financial Report

A copy of the FY25 Quarter 2 Financial Report was included in the agenda packet that was received prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director, Alicia Page, explained that the report was for the unaudited period ending December 31, 2024.

Mrs. Page reported that as of the end of the period, the year-to-date revenues total \$2,543,182.60 of which:

- \$2,073,412.80 or approximately 82% are federal and state funding
- \$317,253.22 or approximately 13% are member dues
- \$71,565.53 or approximately 2% are charges for services
- The remaining \$80,951.05 or 3% is from other revenues

At the end of the period, expenditures totaled \$2,390,705.87. Total transfers and matching obligations for the period were \$200,927.14. Leaving a total surplus of \$152,476.73 for the period end.

Factors that contribute to this surplus include:

- \$33,701.81 in investment income from the Regional Commission's two revolving loan funds. This income is invested back into the RLFs to grow the funds for future available lending.
- The remaining surplus is due to recognized savings from higher than anticipated interest earnings, and conservative spending to facilitate the RCs ongoing operational needs.

Chairman Schubring asked for a motion to accept the FY25 Quarter 2 Financial Report as presented. JoAnne Taylor made the motion to accept the report. James Addison seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

GMRC Health Insurance

Executive Director Feldman explained that GMRC was notified that its current plan, Cigna + Oscar, would be going away and is no longer an option. Using our local broker, a thorough evaluation of all insurance carriers and plans was reviewed and GMRC was presented with two new options to be considered. The most cost-effective and beneficial plan was found to be Cigna Open Access Gold \$2,500. The plan presented is a level funded POS 80/20 plan with a \$2,500 deductible. This plan is similar to the current plan that GMRC is currently operating under. However, due to rising insurance costs this is a 19% increase in funding for premiums. The Cigna Open Access Gold plan would go into effect beginning on February 1st.

Chairman Ken Schubring asked for a motion to approve the Cigna Open Access Gold plan for GMRC staff. Bill Chafin made the motion, and Denise McKay seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Financial Policies and Procedure Updates

The committee received the updated Financial Policies and Procedure prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director Alica Page explained that the GMRC Council adopted our official Finance Policies and Procedures on February 22, 2018 and that from time to time, updates are needed to these policies and procedures to reflect any changes in

federal or state regulations or a change in how GMRC conducts its everyday financial operations.

Changes to the GMRC Policy were noted as follows:

- **Page 4, Revenues:** Removes the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR). The administration for the funding GMRC received from the GDNR now falls under the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.
- **Page 5, Prepaids:** This section has been added to the policies and procedures.
- **Page 6, Bank Accounts:** Changes the account maintenance from six to seven to reflect the CARES Revolving Loan Fund Savings account.
- **Pages 18, Credit Card Policy:** Removes Mobile Training Unit drivers and all references to Mobile Training Units.
- **Page 19, Gift Cards and Prepaid Cards:** This section has been added to the policies and procedures.
- **Page 23, Small Purchases Item C:** Increases the threshold for purchases using WIOA funds to \$10,000. With the revisions to the Uniform Grant Guidance, TCSG has increased their threshold.

All other aspects of the Finance Policies and Procedures remain the same.


Chairman Schubring asked for a motion to approve the Financial Policies and Procedure updates as presented. James Addison made the motion and Bill Chafin seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ANNOUNCEMENTS


The February Council meeting will be held in Banks County.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51 p.m.



Ken Schubring, Chairman



Cliff Bradshaw, Secretary

GMRC COUNCIL
ATTENDANCE SHEET
2024-2025

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COUNTY	COUNCIL MEMBER	July 24	Aug 24	Sept 24	Oct 24	Nov 24	Dec 25	Jan 25	Feb 25	March 25	April 25	May 25	June 25
BANKS	Chris Ausburn	(R)	P		P	A	P	P					
	Sandra Garrison	P	P		P	A	P	P					
	Vicki Boling Jones	(R)	P		P	P	P	P					
DAWSON	Billy Thurmond	P	P		P	P	A	P					
	John Walden	A	A		P	P	P	P					
	Kevin Herrit	P	P		P	P	P	P					
FRANKLIN	Cory Pulliam	P	A		P	E	A	N-E					
	Courtney Umbehant**	A	P		P	P	P	P					
	Leslie McFarlin	A	P		P	A	P	P					
HABERSHAM	Jimmy Tench	P	P		P	P	P	N-E					
	Ray McAllister	P	A		A	P	A	A					
	Ken Schubring*	P	P		P	P	P	P					
HALL	David Gibbs	E	(R)		E	E	A	N-P					
	Sam Couvillon	P	P		R	P	P	(R)					
	Deborah Mack	P	P		P	P	P	A					
HART	Jeff Brown	A	(R)		A	A	A	(P)					
	Dan Leard	P	P		A	A	A	P					
	Bill Chafin	P	A		P	P	P	P					
LUMPKIN	Chris Dockery	(R)	A		P	A	(R)	(R)					
	JoAnne Taylor	A	A		P	P	A	P					
	Tony Owens	A	V		V	N-P	A	P					

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RABUN	Kent Woerner	A	(R)		(R)	(R)	A	(R)					
	Stacy Fountain	A	P		A	A	P	P					
	Douglas Wayne	P	P		P	P	P	P					
	Tara Simmons	P	A		P	P	P	(R)					
STEPHENS	Ron Matheson	P	P		E	P	A	P					
	James Addison	P	P		P	P	P	P					
	Cliff Bradshaw***	A	(P)		(P)	(R)	P	P					
	Andrea Gibby	(R)	(R)		(R)	(R)	A	(R)					
TOWNS	Denise McKay	P	P		P	P	A	P					
	Harold Collins	P	P		A	A	P	N-(R)					
	Jim Conley	P	(P)		P	P	P	P					
	Mitch Griggs	P	P		P	P	P	P					
WHITE	Craig Bryant	N-P	P		P	(P)	P	P					
	Nan Bowen	P	P		P	(P)	P	P					
	Lauren Williams	N-P	P		P	P	P	A					
	Kim Waters	(P)	P		P	P	P	P					
GOV APPT.	Angela Whidby	P	P		(P)	(P)	P	P					
	VACANT	V	V		V	V	V	V					
	David Lee	P	P		P	P	P	P					
	VACANT	V	V		V	V	V	V					
LT. GOV APPT.													
SPEAKER APPT.													

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

* Chairman
** Vice Chairman
*** Secretary