

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION
COUNCIL MEETING
January 25, 2024

MINUTES

The GMRC Council held its regular monthly meeting on January 25, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the Cornelia Community House located at 601 Wyly Street, Cornelia, GA 30531. The meeting was hosted by the City of Cornelia.

CALL TO ORDER

GMRC Chairman Ken Schubring called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS

The City of Cornelia Mayor John Borrow welcomed everybody to Cornelia. The mayor thanked GMRC for all the work they do, and thanked Fenders Diner for catering the meal for the evening. Mayor Borrow extended a special thank you to the engineering firm, Carter & Sloope, for sponsoring the event.

INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Vice-Chairman Courtney Umbehant recognized special guests; Cheryl Smith, Georgia Department of Agriculture; Mike Fisher, WGI; Kathy Papa, Department of Community Affairs; David Lee, Jackson EMC; Katrina Cochran, Northeast Georgia Outreach Representative for Senator Ralphael Warnock; Salik Sohani, Northeast Georgia Outreach Director for Senator Ralphael Warnock; Chase West, Carter & Sloope; Benjie and Marsha Hopkins, Hopkins and Associates; 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 Fenders Diner in Cornelia.

PROGRAM

Kay Sibetta, Associate State Director, AARP Georgia State Office recognized the GMRC Region as an Age Friendly Community. Each county in the GMRC Region was presented with a certificate and welcomed into the AARP Network of Age Friendly States and Communities.

CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES AND ATTENDANCE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Secretary Bruce Palmer asked for any comments or a motion regarding the minutes and attendance report for the December 1, 2023 Council meeting. Cliff Bradshaw made a

motion to approve the minutes as written and Angela Whidby seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

Chairman's Report

Chairman Ken Schubring asked the Council to keep George Wangemann's family in their thoughts and prayers. The Chairman reported that he would be attending the GARC Executive Director's and Policy Official's meeting in Macon on February 1, 2024.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Feldman expressed how deeply saddened GMRC is by the loss of longtime Council member George Wangemann. Having served on the GMRC Council for nearly 20 years, Mr. Wangemann was a true friend and advocate to the GMRC and the entire region.

Mrs. Feldman welcomed the newest GMRC Council members, and introduced John Walden, Mayor, City of Dawsonville; Ray McAllister, Mayor, Town of Mount Airy; Sam Couvillon, Mayor, City of Gainesville; and Terry Carter, Vice-Mayor for the City of Toccoa. Mrs. Feldman and Ms. Kessler have already scheduled and/or conducted orientation with the new members and are excited about the leadership qualities they will add to the Council.

GMRC is pleased to welcome its two newest employees: Ms. Laura Brown, is serving as the Intake and Eligibility Specialist at the WorkSource office and is doing a great job in her new role. Ms. Maggie Smith has also been hired to serve as the new Project Manager for Economic Development. Ms. Smith will begin her employment with GMRC on Monday, February 5th.

In December, GMRC was notified by the Office of Inspector General's office that it was conducting an audit on the CARES Act RLF program funds. Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC was the very first RLF program that was audited, and the audit was completed in a days' time. The auditors also went on a site visit to Ritz Instrument in Hart County, which received CARES Act funding. Mrs. Feldman thanked Senior Project Manager Laurin Yoder for pulling the files and submitting the follow-up information.

Executive Director Feldman reminded the Council that GMRC is continuing its work with the Center for Economic Development Research at Georgia Tech on the Georgia Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing grant (GA-AIM). The project is in the second phase of the process, and GMRC will be hosting a focus group on February 28th from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. Upon completion of the project, information will be shared with the Council and the communities that GMRC serves. Mrs. Feldman thanked Leslie McFarlin and President Wilkinson for allowing the focus group to be hosted at NGTC. Mrs. Feldman asked all attendees to please encourage their local businesses and industries, education partners, and chamber staff to attend this informative meeting.

Executive Director Feldman reported that GMRC will be hosting a procurement workshop on Tuesday, February 13th from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at the WorkSource Georgia Mountains office, 1856 Thompson Bridge Rd., Gainesville, GA 30501. Brittney Hickom, Compliance Manager for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and Amanda Carroll, Senior Project Manager for the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, will be presenting on how to properly follow procurement policy for your grant applications completed through their respective agencies. Anybody interested in attending, should RSVP by Friday, February 2, 2024 with Patrick Larson at plarson@gmrc.ga.gov. At the time of the Council meeting there were 27 attendees registered for the event.

Mrs. Feldman announced that the Development Authority of Dawson County had been awarded a \$300,000 OneGeorgia Equity Fund investment for the construction of water system improvements along Lumpkin Campground Road. The awarded funds are being matched with \$390,000 in matching cash and in-kind donations from the Development Authority and the Etowah Water and Sewer Authority for an estimated total project cost of \$690,000. Mrs. Feldman congratulated the Development Authority and Patrick Larson who assisted on the project.

Save the Date: The GMRC's quarterly Region 2 City and County Managers meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 21st at 10:00 a.m. Mrs. Feldman thanked Stephens County for hosting the meeting and Carter & Sloope Engineering for sponsoring the lunch. Mrs. Feldman encouraged the city or county managers to attend.

Save the Date: The annual Clerk's Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 30th. This is a great opportunity for all Region 2 clerks to network with each other and discuss topics of mutual interest and benefit. DCA staff will be in attendance to also host a mini training session on local government reporting. More information will be forthcoming, but if you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Gina Kessler at 770-538-2607 or gkessler@gmrc.ga.gov

Quarterly Finance Report

A copy of the FY23 Quarter 1 Finance Report was sent out to all Council members prior to the meeting. GMRC Finance Director Alicia Page explained that the report was for the unaudited period ending December 31, 2023.

As of the period end, the year-to-date revenues total \$2,637,708.35 of which:

- \$1,886,275.32 or approximately 72% are federal and state funding.
- \$310,310.10 or approximately 12% are member dues.
- \$386,238.06 or approximately 15% are charges for services.
- The remaining \$54,884.87 or 1% is for other revenues.

At the end of the period, expenditures totaled \$2,410,087.92. Total transfers and matching obligations for the period were \$99,660.55. Leaving a total surplus of \$227,620.43 for the period end.

Factors that contribute to this surplus include:

- \$16,167.88 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 in order to facilitate the RCs ongoing operational needs.

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Leadership North Georgia

Executive Director Feldman announced that GMRC has been collaborating with University of North Georgia on the development of a regional leadership program similar to Leadership Georgia or the Appalachian Leadership Institute. The mission of the program is: *"Leadership North Georgia will drive collaboration and cultivate leaders to strengthen communities and advocate for economic prosperity in Northeast Georgia"*.

The program is designed to complement not compete with other local leadership programs. The inaugural cohort will have 24 participants and must live, work, or serve in the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's area or in a county immediately adjacent to the GMRC. There will be eight sessions kicking off in August of 2024 and ending in April 2025.

Learning Objectives include:

- Session 1: Orientation and Foundations
- Session 2: Conserving, Protecting, and Promoting Cultural and Natural Resources
- Session 3: Land Use and Sustainable Development
- Session 4: Developing Community Facilities and Infrastructure
- Session 5: Building North Georgia Business and Industry
- Session 6: Fostering Entrepreneurship & Innovation
- Session 7: Building Community Capacity
- Session 8: Graduation and Next Steps

The program will be tuition based for participants and will not cost the GMRC anything. Sessions will be two days and overnight stays throughout the GMRC region will be required.

Chairman Schubring asked for a motion to allow GMRC to partner with University of North Georgia to endorse Leadership North Georgia. Vicki Boling Jones made the motion and Cliff Bradshaw seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Presentation of Strategic Plan

Executive Director Feldman informed the Council that the Strategic Plan has been updated and will be sent out on Monday for review, as it will be brought before Council for a vote on February 29, 2024.

GMRC Server Replacement

Information Services Director Faith Bryan reiterated that the Council had approved a budget amendment to FY24's budget to allocate approximately \$50,000 in general funds for the purpose of replacing the server at both the Ridge Road office and the WorkSource office. The Request for Proposals was released for 30 days on October 30, 2023, and one response was received from IS Consulting. The total cost of the proposal received is under the allotted \$50,000.00 budget amendment approved by Council.

Details of the proposal are:

Equipment and Installation - \$39,661.93
VPN – All Staff (Annually) - \$1,260.00
Total Cost - \$ 40,921.93

Chairman Schubring asked for a motion to approve the replacement of the serves for \$40, 921.93. Chris Dockery made the motion and Lamar Paris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

GMRC Health Insurance

Executive Director Feldman explained to the Council that GMRC was notified late November that the renewal from United Healthcare was going up about 30% for health insurance premiums. Using a local broker, a thorough evaluation of all insurance carriers and plans was reviewed and Mrs. Feldman and Mrs. Page were presented with new options for consideration. Of those plans, the most cost-effective and beneficial plan was found to be Cigna+Oscar. The plan presented is a level funded POS 80/20 plan with a \$2,500 deductible. In an effort to reduce costs for spouse and dependent coverage, GMRC is also offering two additional plans with higher deductibles for staff to choose from. While this new plan would still be higher than what is currently being paid, it is still less than what GMRC was paying two years ago before the switch to United Healthcare. The Cigna+Oscar plans would go into effect beginning on February 1st.

Chairman Schubring asked for a motion to approve changing health insurance from United Healthcare to Cigna+Oscar. Courtney Umbehant made the motion and Angela Whidby seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

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 | | | | | |
| | Sandra Garrison | (P) | P | A | A | P | P | P | | | | | |
| | Vicki Boiling Jones | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| DAWSON | Billy Thurmond | P | A | P | P | P | A | A | | | | | |
| | John Walden | (P) | P | P | A | A | P | N-A | | | | | |
| | Kevin Herrit | A | P | P | P | P | P | A | | | | | |
| FRANKLIN | Robert Franklin | P | A | A | A | A | P | P | | | | | |
| | Courtney Umbehant** | P | P | P | P | (P) | P | P | | | | | |
| | Leslie McFarlin | P | P | P | A | P | P | P | | | | | |
| HABERSHAM | Bruce Palmer*** | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| | Ray McAllister | P | P | A | A | V | V | N-P | | | | | |
| | Ken Schubring* | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| HALL | Richard Higgins | A | A | A | A | R | A | E | | | | | |
| | Sam Couvillon | P | P | P | P | P | A | N-A | | | | | |
| | Deborah Mack | P | P | P | P | A | P | P | | | | | |
| HART | Jeff Brown | A | P | A | A | P | A | A | | | | | |
| | Dan Leard | P | P | A | A | P | A | P | | | | | |
| | Bill Chafin | P | P | P | P | P | P | A | | | | | |
| LUMPKIN | Chris Dockery | (R) | (R) | A | P | R | R | P | | | | | |
| | JoAnne Taylor | P | A | A | P | P | A | E | | | | | |
| | Amy Booker | N | A | P | A | A | P | A | | | | | |

GMRC COUNCIL
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2023-2024

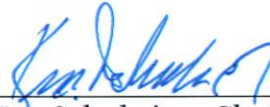
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|---------------|-----------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|----------|--------|---------|
| RABUN | Kent Woerner | (R) | A | A | (R) | (R) | A | A | | | | | |
| | Althea Bleckley | P | P | P | A | A | P | A | | | | | |
| | Douglas Wayne | P | P | A | P | P | P | A | | | | | |
| STEPHENS | Tara Simmons | P | A | P | P | A | P | P | | | | | |
| | VACANT | P | P | (R) | A | A | A | V | | | | | |
| TOWNS | James Addison | P | E | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| | Cliff Bradshaw | P | P | P | (P) | (P) | P | P | | | | | |
| | Andrea Gibby | P | (R) | (R) | A | A | A | N-A | | | | | |
| | Denise McKay | R | P | P | P | P | A | (R) | | | | | |
| UNION | Lamar Paris | P | P | A | P | A | P | P | | | | | |
| | Jim Conley | P | P | (P) | P | P | P | E | | | | | |
| WHITE | Mitch Griggs | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| | Travis Turner | (P) | (P) | P | (P) | A | P | (P) | | | | | |
| | Nan Bowen | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | | | | | |
| GOV APPT. | Susan Cremering | A | P | P | P | A | P | A | | | | | |
| | VACANT | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | | | | | |
| | Angela Whidby | P | A | P | P | A | P | P | | | | | |
| LT. GOV APPT. | VACANT | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | | | | | |
| | VACANT | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | | | | | |
| SPEAKER APPT. | VACANT | 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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:48 p.m.



Ken Schubring, Chairman



Bruce Palmer, Secretary