

**MINUTES OF THE
COASTAL REGIONAL COMMISSION COUNCIL
November 8, 2023
Richmond Hill City Center, Richmond Hill, GA
10:00 A.M.**

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Ken Lee called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Veterans were asked to stand and were recognized. Invocation was provided by Chairman Chester Ellis followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ken Lee, Rosa Romeo, Preston Dees, Reggie Loper, Rebecca Boston, Dan Coty, Sammy Tostensen, Craig Root, Walter Gibson, Carter Infinger, Chester Ellis, Tom Ratcliffe, Richard Hayes, Chris Blaine, Tanet Myers, Shaw McVeigh, Jones Hooks, Sabrina Kent, Kristy Chance, Donald Lovette, Allen Brown, Kate Karwacki, and Steven Asplund.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jonathan McCollar, Jason Coley, Julie Martin, Lannie Brant, Hugh Hodge, Allen Amason, Mary Hamilton, Tammy Goober, Steve Scholar, Van Johnson, Robert Parker, Anthony Simmons, William Bland, Jr., and Chap Bennett.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: Dorothy Glisson, Screven County and Dina McKain, Fort Stewart

GUESTS: Molly Cook and Bryan Lunn, Fort Stewart; Rusty Haygood and Jennifer Fordham, DCA; Senator Billy Hickman; Kurt Hardison, CPA, McNair, McLemore, Middlebrooks & Col, LLC; and Annette Wynn, SCCPSS.

STAFF PRESENT: Allen Burns, Executive Director; Dionne Lovett, Assistant Executive Director; Lena Geiger, Finance Director; Kameron Dickerson, Senior Fiscal Analyst; Barry James, Transportation Director; Aaron Carpenter, Planning & Government Services Director; Wincy Poon, GIS Manager; Pamela Rogers, Aging Services Director; Chrishonda Grant, HR Transit Coordinator; and Colletta Harper, Administrative Services Director/HR.

PRESENTATION OF OUTGOING COUNCIL MEMBER PLAQUES: Chairman Ken Lee presented plaques to Dina McKain, Fort Stewart and Mayor Allen Brown, City of Hinesville. Brunswick City Commissioner Julie Martin was unable to attend and will attend in January.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion was made to approve the October 11th meeting minutes. Shaw McVeigh requested minutes be amended to include a sentence in the GDOT Update that Ms. Purcell elaborated on other specific transportation projects throughout the CRC's 10 county region. Motion was amended to include the sentence.

Motion: Commissioner Rosa Romeo
Second: Chairman Chester Ellis
Vote: Unanimous

BUSINESS ITEMS

APPROVAL OF FY23 ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT/AUDIT: *(See Attachment 1, attached herein and made a part of these minutes.)* Budget & Finance Committee Chairman Dan Coty stated that David McCoy recently had surgery and that Kurt Hardison had presented the Audit to the Budget & Finance Committee earlier. Members received a draft copy of the Audit, and the changes that were made were provided in a memo. Chairman Coty stated that he had received a final copy of the Audit, and that it was available online, and could be mailed to any member who wanted a final copy. Mr. Kurt Hardison, CPA with McNair, McLemore, Middlebrooks & Co., LLC, referred members to page 145, the Summary of Auditor's Report, which shows the CRC received an unmodified opinion, with no material weaknesses or significant

deficiencies identified. Mr. Hardison then provided some highlights of the Audit. Pages 34 & 35 shows the Net position is \$5.14 million, with \$2.2 million in capital assets, and a little under \$2.9 million in unrestricted funds. The General revenues included a gain on assets of just under \$290K as a portion of the Darien office building was sold during FY23. The general fund unassigned balance is \$3.2 million. There are some non-spendable and assigned amounts as well, and page 57 breaks down the fund balances by category and department. Page 63 shows the lease liability was paid off in the amount of \$796,000. An important note is that even though the lease was paid off, the fund balance is still healthy, and increased \$331K. He thanked Lena and her staff, as they prepare the report, and his firm only has 6-7 pages that they provide, they mainly audit all the numbers. A brief Q & A followed his presentation. It was questioned if it was normal for the pension liability to go up \$1 million a year. Mr. Hardison stated they have seen large fluctuations with other entities, as it is based off the actuarial report and sometimes it swings in the opposite direction. Finance Director Lena Geiger explained that the defined benefit program is market driven and the year that was reported (22) was a bad year in the stock market and we expect it will improve with the next report cycle. A motion was made to approve the FY23 ACFR as presented.

Motion: Dan Coty
Second: Chairman Donald Lovette
Vote: Unanimous

PRESENTATION

Legislative Update: Senator Billy Hickman stated that power has shifted to South Georgia and we are fortunate to have strong leaders like Speaker Jon Burns, 50 miles from us; Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee Matt Hackett, Dublin, GA; Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Blake Tillery, Vidalia, GA; and Ann Purcell, Vice President of GDOT Board from Effingham County.

Senator Hickman stated his focus is on literacy, and pioneered SB211, a three-year bill which establishes a Council on Literacy to look at four areas (1) Birth – Age 5; (2) K – 3; (3) Are Teachers in Georgia being taught to teach children how to read; and (4) Community Involvement, to discover and recommend where/how improvements can be made. He encouraged counties to make literacy a #1 priority and encourage tutors and mentors – if parents can't read, they can't help their children. Children that graduate and can't read have a hard time filling out job applications and entering the workforce, much less going to college. School safety is a big issue and \$50k has been given to all schools for security purposes. There are 45-48 tax credits in Georgia that amount to billions of dollars a year. The film industry is the largest user, and the film tax credit doesn't have a cap. Last year their tax credit was about \$1.4 billion. Georgia is the number one place in the world for movies and television shows, ahead of LA and NY, and the film industry brings approximately 75,000 jobs in Georgia. He stated he believes they will be looking to put a cap on this in the future. Some items he expects to come up in the next legislative session include: Tort Reform (too many frivolous lawsuits); school choice; and possibly a gaming bill in the form of a constitutional amendment, which would allow voters to express their opinion, and then allow each community to vote on if they want it for their community. He indicated the biggest hurdle was for the democrats and republicans to come together to decide where the money would go. A brief Q & A followed.

Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Update – Mr. Rusty Haygood, Deputy Commissioner, DCA, provided an update on DCA. DCA administers 70-80 programs, including housing tax credits and historic preservation practices. DCA and all the regional commissions are similarly tasked to improve the quality of life in our communities. In April 2023, the Governor signed off on the Rural Workforce Housing Initiative and they created a program, held workshops, created an application, received the first round of applications, reviewed, scored and made awards, and have received the second round of applications. Colquitt, Albany, Columbus, Douglas and Stephens County were the first recipients of the award. Approximately \$8.7

million was awarded to facilitate housing development at an affordable price for the workforce in the community. After a detailed analysis, it was determined that the sales price should be around \$125k-\$290k and that ranges would vary by community. The communities that received the awards had been planning for housing, had ready-made plans and activities, and the developers were ready to go and were able to meet the six-eight weeks deadline. We are in the process of reviewing the second round of applications. For those communities who haven't gotten an application in that are interested, we hope there will be additional funds appropriated to this program in the next legislative session. Coincidentally, the awarded communities had participated in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH), which was not an application requirement. Congratulations to St. Marys, they were one of five communities accepted in the 2024 freshman class of GICH.

Through funding received during the pandemic, approximately \$73 million has been deployed to food banks across the state. There are also two food bank facilities in this region that are being expanded and one is also being relocated. The relocation was needed since they were in an area (Chatham) that flooded on many occasions and had poor traffic flow. The new location is on higher ground and closer to the interstate. There were no questions after the presentation.

OTHER BUSINESS

Project Status Reports - *(See Attachments 2, 3, 4, and 5 attached herein and made a part of these minutes.)*
Planning – Mr. Jones Hooks asked if with the quick urbanization taking place in our region if any local governments had requested the CRC's assistance. Planning Director Aaron Carpenter responded that Bulloch County reached out following the announcement of the Hyundai plant and actually paused development to address some issues. He stated we updated the Regional Comprehensive Plan last year, and, we worked with Georgia Southern University to do a study to capture the 19,000 jobs and how that will impact housing and infrastructure. It was agreed that a region-wide approach is very important and the CRC needs to be advocating and talking about the issues that urban areas will face as a result of the Hyundai plant and other subsequent developments in the region.

Transportation - Mr. Shaw McVeigh called attention to the loss-to-date and to the analysis Kameron did and questioned if it was autogenerated or could it be? Kameron responded that it was not. He suggested that it be formatted to autogenerate so it could be presented every time we had a meeting. Shaw reiterated the reason he requested the line-by-line analysis was because he believes it ought to bring attention to something we might be able to do differently in order to make it sound. He also questioned how we plan to make up the difference if we lose money? Assistant Executive Director Dionne Lovett replied from the fund balance that is currently available. She stated that we are still working to shore up transportation efficiencies and that Barry plans on using more technology to help us look at route systems, beyond QRyde, to help us identify our idle and downtime. Mr. Dan Coty stated during a discussion in the Budget & Finance Committee meeting he came away with the feeling that we are moving in the right direction and are in better shape than we have been in a long time. Mr. McVeigh stated he agrees, he just wants to make sure we stay on course.

Ms. Rebecca Boston questioned if the grant with DBHDD had been secured. Ms. Lovett responded that those funds come in as part of DHS funds and we are discussing with Modivcare the DPH part for non-emergency medical trips. Since GDOT is pushing us in that direction, we will start small with one county so that we don't create a bigger problem for ourselves. Transportation Director Barry James added that we are looking at Liberty County for a trial run of the Modivcare program, and they anticipate approximately 1,000 trips a month. He stated we are close to running that already, so we will have to see what we can do. He added that the rates they will pay us are very good, and, if we cannot meet all of their trip needs, they can roll them to their next provider, we would just be an additional cog in their wheel to provide services.

CADDA Report: *(See Attachment 6, attached herein and made a part of these minutes.)* There were no questions regarding the report.

Mr. Shaw McVeigh announced that the GARC Annual Conference is this afternoon, Thursday, and part of Friday. They always have a good agenda and it's well worth the time, if anyone wants to attend, let Allen or Dionne know.

ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Thanks to Lena and staff for their work on the Audit.
- HVAC– No one attended the bidders' conference. Bids are due November 20th. Awarded by November 30th.
- Insurance updates– we received about a \$1,700/year increase in Life and Dental. In the past, Council has agreed to pick up the increase so we can continue to cover the employee costs as a benefit. If there are no objections, we will continue to do the same. No objections noted.
- The 45-day stopgap measure expires November 17th and we don't expect an immediate impact.
- Personnel Lawsuit – Executive Director Allen Burns reported that the former employee did file an appeal on the 30th day. We will have to appear, and the court will probably require us to go back to mediation, but it will be the insurance company who will decide if we settle. The court ordered him to reimburse about \$7,000, and he has requested a stay on that ruling.
- Georgia House Rural Development Council met in Statesboro on October 25th at GA Southern. Healthcare was the focus of the meeting.
- GaDNR Environmental Protection Division is hosting a Stakeholder Meeting regarding red/yellow zone groundwater on November 16th at 9:00 am at Convention Center in Savannah. This meeting is by invitation only and is specifically for groundwater permit holders in Chatham, Effingham, Bryan, Liberty, Bulloch, Long, & McIntosh counties. The CRC did not receive an invitation; however, I reached out to them, and will be attending.
- A Disability Etiquette Training (showing how to interact with those with a disability) was held at the CRC office, hosted by the Aging Services Department.
- The GMA District 12 Fall meeting was held in Guyton on November 1st. Affordable housing, negotiation processes for LOST, and Service Delivery Strategies are their top issues/interests for this year.
- General Assembly Special Session on November 29th to address redistricting and re-draw congressional and state district lines. While most of the news media have focused on re-drawing congressional boundaries, the districts for state senators and state representatives are included in the order as well.
- General Assembly regular session begins January 8th.
- Congratulations to Lena, she is now a Certified Retirement Plan Fiduciary after attending the GA Association of Public Pension Trustees training program (under scholarship).
- Congratulations to Kameron Dickerson, she was a sole awardee from Georgia of the GA Govt Finance Officers Leadership Scholarship to attend the National GFOA Leadership Academy in North Carolina. Kameron is one of 35 participants chosen from US and Canada to attend the leadership academy.

- The office will be closed on Thursday for Veterans' Day. Transit will still operate and some staff will attend the GARC conference.
- Thank you Craig Root for the invitation to the CADDA networking event – it was spectacular.
- Wendy Lynah, ADRC Counselor with the CRC for five years, unexpectedly passed away. We offered group grief counseling at the office on Wednesday Nov 1st. Approximately 20 staff members attended her memorial service on Saturday, November 4th.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: *(See Attachment 7, attached herein and made a part of these minutes)* A motion was made to go into Executive Session at 11:49 a.m. to discuss or deliberate upon the appointment, employment compensation, hiring, disciplinary action, dismissal, periodic evaluation or rating of a government officer or employee.

Motion: Dan Coty
Second: Chairman Chester Ellis
Vote: Unanimous

MEETING RECONVENED at 12:20 p.m.: A motion was made to extend Dionne Lovett's position as Interim Executive Director until the advertising/hiring process is completed and an Executive Director is hired. It was noted that Allen is overseeing everything that Dionne is doing and providing guidance as needed.

Motion: Dorothy Glisson
Second: Commissioner Rosa Romeo
Vote: 13 Yes
7 No

Chairman Lee stated that staff had questioned if we wanted to do a retirement event for Allen. Chairman Lee advised that if everyone was agreeable, the Transition Committee would assume responsibility and work with staff. No objections.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m., with lunch following.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting will be on January 10th at 10:00 a.m. at the Richmond Hill City Center.