

## **Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water And Sewer Authority Meeting**

January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 7:00 PM  
City of Fairburn- City Hall  
56 SW Malone St, Fairburn, GA 30213

- I. Chairwoman Sonja Fillingame called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.
- II. Roll Call was taken by Secretary Jessica Davis with the following board members present:

The Honorable Chairwoman Sonja Fillingame  
The Honorable Mayor Vince Williams                                    The Honorable Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith  
The Honorable Vice-Chair Mario Avery                                    The Honorable City Manager Tony Phillips  
The Honorable Councilman Brian Jones

The following board members were absent:  
The Honorable Councilman Nathan Slaton (City Manager Sylvia Redic attended on Councilman Slaton's behalf)

The attendance of the board constituted a quorum, and the meeting proceeded.

**III. Approval of the 2025 Elected Offices:**

Mayor Vince Williams made a motion to retain City Manager Fillingame as the chair, Mayor Avery as the vice chair, and to nominate Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith as the Secretary/Treasurer. Mayor Avery seconded the motion.                                    **Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**

**IV. Approval of Water Authority Minutes:**

The motion to approve the amended Water Authority Minutes from December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024 was made by Councilmember Brian Jones and seconded by Mayor Williams.                                    **Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**

**V. Discussion & Approval**

The motion to approve the 2025 Water Authority Meeting Schedule was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilman Jones.                                    **Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**

**VI. Reports:**

**1. Authority Attorney**

- Attorney Davenport thanked the Chair and mentioned that he had some holdover business from the November meeting. He explained that there was an item regarding a resolution for the Water and Sewer Authority to reaffirm the operations and maintenance agreement from 2003, which was tabled during the November meeting to be addressed at tonight's meeting. He asked the body for direction on how they wanted to proceed with the document.
- City Manager Phillips stated that he had coordinated with GM Farmer, and the staff from the authority would be attending the Fairburn work session on the 27<sup>th</sup>. He mentioned that after that presentation and discussion by the elected officials, they would be better positioned to discuss the matter moving forward.

- Chairwoman Fillingame responded, acknowledging the discussion about Fairburn and the scheduled meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup>. She asked if the body would be willing to wait until after that meeting for further discussion.
- Mayor Williams expressed that the intention was for the cities to have a meeting with their councils, and he believed it would be appropriate to hold this over for another 30 days, if that was the pleasure of the body. He emphasized that they should make sure it was exactly 30 days in order to properly dismiss the matter.
- City Manager Sylvia Redic made a motion to table the reaffirmation of the operations and maintenance agreement from 2003 for the resolution for the Water and Sewer Authority for 30 days, and the motion was seconded by Mayor Williams for February 11<sup>th</sup>.  
**Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**
- Mayor Williams asked if Palmetto had an opportunity to meet with staff.
- Mayor Smith responded, "Yes!"

## 2. Financial Manager

- Attorney Dennis Davenport presented the following requisitions:

The Motion to approve Req #272 in the amount of \$33,293.28 was made by Councilmember Jones and seconded by Mayor Williams. **Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**

## 3. Project Managers:

The project managers met with GEFA on December 19<sup>th</sup>, and they indicated that they would execute the modification and extend the term of the loan. As a result, a brief two-sentence letter was submitted requesting the loan extension, and they are currently waiting for a response.

During the meeting, GEFA also expressed a willingness to discuss additional future funding. However, certain requirements would need to be met to proceed. These include providing current financial audits from all the cities involved, an understanding of the total project cost (not just for the authority, but for each individual city that plans to connect to the authority's water system), and being aware of new GEFA policies that will be implemented in 2025. These policies will impact the process, financial limits, and introduce a more competitive process than in previous years. Preapplications for this year's funding are due by March 31<sup>st</sup>.

Mayor Smith stated that she didn't have a question but wanted to emphasize that there is no clear timeline for when Palmetto's audits will be completed. She mentioned that the city is currently stuck on the 2022 audit, which has been pending since possibly 2022, as the 2021 audit was just completed last year. She highlighted that there are numerous components missing in the audit, which are challenging to address. She spoke with Larry Hansen at "Eggs and Issues," and he mentioned that a new rule may be coming out to address situations like this, as Palmetto is not the only city facing such issues. However, until that happens, there is no clear timeline for when the audit will be done. Mayor Smith emphasized that she wanted to be honest and transparent with everyone and that this uncertainty will remain until it is resolved. City Manager Sylvia Redic confirmed that they do not know when the audit will be completed.

Mayor Williams expressed appreciation for Mayor Smith's transparency, acknowledging that one of their cities is facing difficulties due to the lack of an audit. He pointed out that this issue places them at a disadvantage when pursuing water and infrastructure projects, especially given the governor's support for these types of projects. While understanding the situation, Mayor Williams also suggested connecting with other resources to explore ways to expedite the process. He mentioned that Mauldin and Jenkins are one of the auditors they might work with, and there could be opportunities to take advantage of the governor's focus on supporting water projects.

Project Manager Benz stated that GEFA informed them that they would like to see the authority expand, if possible. They explained that such an expansion would require an act of the legislature, but GEFA still expressed interest in this idea.

City Manager Phillips found this interesting, noting that future requests would be subject to modified financing availability, which seems to suggest less money and a more competitive process. He asked the project managers for their takeaways from this.

Project Manager Benz explained that GEFA would like to see the authority expand beyond just the three cities currently involved. They were interested in whether the authority could serve water to areas such as Chattahoochee Hills, South Fulton, and other nearby regions. However, they clarified that this would be a challenging task.

City Manager Phillips asked if this would make the funding more viable.

Project Manager Gray responded that GEFA has new criteria for competitive funding, and one of the higher priorities is regional projects. They liked the collaboration between the three cities but were also open to the possibility of adding more cities to the mix, as it would be seen as a stronger regional project.

Mayor Williams acknowledged that expanding to other cities like Chattahoochee Hills and South Fulton would be a great opportunity but emphasized that these cities were not part of the original plan when the authority was established. While they would welcome them as customers, any expansion would need to be carefully considered.

Project Manager Benz reiterated that GEFA had brought up the expansion idea as something they were open to, which was unexpected, but interesting.

Project Manager Gray explained that the overall sentiment of the meeting was positive. GEFA is in the business of helping communities fund water and sewer projects, and they felt good about the meeting. They were quick to express their willingness to renew the loan once they were informed that the authority had voted to move forward. The necessary paperwork has been submitted to GEFA, and they are now just waiting for the paperwork to be returned for signatures.

City Manager Redic asked if they could assume that the competitiveness for funding had shifted because of the large number of applications, as many communities are facing infrastructure issues. The answer was yes.

Mayor Smith asked how long GEFA had extended the loan terms, specifically whether they had provided a clear extension period.

The project managers explained that GEFA had not provided the exact documentation but had instead based the extension on the authority's schedule. They included the project schedule in the letter to GEFA, which showed a start date in February and a completion date in 2030. The loan extension would be tied to this schedule, and GEFA is interested in the authority spending the money as planned, which would go toward repayment. They emphasized that GEFA wants the money to be used for its intended purpose, as that is the primary function of the agency.

Chairwoman Fillingame noted that the process is likely to become more competitive, particularly after the announcement made today in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* about the governor's plans to make more investments in infrastructure, including water and sewer projects.

The project managers explained that GEFA emphasized the importance of understanding the total project costs, which includes not only the authority's portion but also what each city needs to do to connect to the system and how they will pay for it. The project managers noted that, up to this point, each party—whether the authority or the individual cities—has been operating somewhat independently. The authority has its own engineering team, and each city has its engineers, but there hasn't been a clear view of what each city is doing.

To address this, the project managers requested permission to coordinate a meeting with all the engineers involved—those from the three cities and the authority's engineers—at the start of the project. The goal would be to align everyone's efforts and begin the project with clear communication. They suggested having an initial in-person kickoff meeting, followed by bi-weekly Zoom meetings to ensure constant communication and collaboration. This way, everyone can track progress and address potential issues as they arise. They emphasized that if, for example, Fairburn doesn't have the necessary infrastructure in place by the end of the schedule, it could create major problems, such as an inability to sell water or pay bills.

City Manager Phillips expressed his agreement with the suggestion, saying it was an excellent idea. He mentioned that Fairburn's engineering team is eager to engage in this dialogue to ensure that all parties are on the same page and working together cohesively. He appreciated the project managers' approach.

City Manager Redic added that while the focus was on the engineers, it's also important to involve the identified staff in the process. She emphasized that the engineers shouldn't work in isolation from the staff who are directly involved with the project.

4. **General Manager:** Mr. Farmer thanked City Manager Phillips for referencing the upcoming meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup>. He also mentioned that on December 30<sup>th</sup>, he worked with Cindy Givens on immigration compliance and checked off several necessary steps. He expressed his appreciation for the project managers' work with GEFA. He has requested Mr. Jared Jackson to put together an engineering proposal for the board to review, which would be discussed shortly. He emphasized the urgency of this task, noting that the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) has been approved by EPD, and GEFA is pleased with the conceptual plan.

Mayor Williams asked if they had any idea when the engineering proposal would be available for review.

Mr. Farmer replied that, after speaking with Mr. Jackson, they expect to have the proposal ready by February.

Mayor Smith then asked Mr. Farmer if he could meet with her outside of his demanding schedule. She expressed that since the first meeting, they haven't really had a chance to connect about Palmetto's role in the project. She wanted to understand how Palmetto fits into the overall plan and what is expected from the city. She emphasized the need for direct communication so that Palmetto can be properly aligned with the other cities and the authority in moving forward.

- 5. Owner's Engineer:** Mr. Jackson stated that they are excited to be moving forward with the project, as the board had directed them to proceed with the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) option from the previous meeting. He expressed enthusiasm about the project's progression, particularly because it would extend the loan. The project managers had mentioned in previous meetings that the intent is to use that funding for engineering, and it's not required to go through the queue process. As Mr. Farmer stated, he has requested Krebs to provide a proposal for engineering design services based on the PER option. They are working on the proposal and expect to have it ready for the board by early February, allowing time for review before the next board meeting. The goal is to stay on schedule with GEFA and begin the engineering design process in February. Mr. Jackson confirmed that the proposal would be included in the board packet for review and consideration at the next meeting.

Councilmember Jones asked if there had been any change in market conditions since the retreat that would affect the cost of the project. He noted that the market fluctuates, and he was interested in whether the cost had decreased or increased since their last review.

Mr. Jackson responded that he had seen a reduction in costs but noted that they could either stabilize or continue to rise slowly. The project cost was just over \$160 million, which was the figure presented in the GEFA application, and it was the same estimate seen at the retreat.

Mayor Avery added that at their council meeting the previous night, it was made clear that project costs were expected to rise significantly. He emphasized that the costs are likely to increase, which aligns with his earlier concerns.

City Manager Phillips mentioned that an announcement made in December indicated that the expected rate cuts, which many had been relying on, were unlikely to materialize as originally anticipated.

Mr. Jackson clarified that the discussion seemed to be addressing two different issues: interest rates and material/equipment costs. He explained that the rising costs they are concerned about are related to materials, equipment, and installation, not necessarily to funding. He assured the board that as the project progresses, they would provide milestone cost estimates so that the board can review and offer input, allowing for adjustments to the design if necessary.

City Manager Redic acknowledged the point and thanked Mr. Jackson for the clarification. She then raised a question about the decision to work exclusively with one firm for engineering services. She asked why the board would not consider other options and whether the decision was based solely on experience with the selected firm or other factors. She inquired if there were any reasons for not looking into other potential engineering firms.

Mayor Williams informed City Manager Redic that the authority did consider other options and Krebs was the firm we considered.

## **VII. Other Business:**

Mayor Smith stated that she had a few questions she needed clarity on, as she wasn't present at the last meeting. She mentioned that Councilman Slaton had asked a few questions on her behalf, but she wanted to make sure she understood them.

Chairwoman Fillingame recalled that those questions were supposed to be directed to the general manager and the project team for further clarification, so they could be answered appropriately. Mayor Smith then brought up a specific question regarding the required supplementary information that Councilman Slaton had inquired about. She explained that she had been reviewing the minutes and couldn't quite grasp what went wrong with that issue. The minutes mentioned that the information was omitted, and Attorney Davenport was confused, stating that Dan Post had not conducted the audits, and the finance person managed the process, referring to Mauldin & Jenkins.

Mayor Smith's concern was that the required supplementary information wasn't included in the audits, and based on her understanding, this supplementary section typically explains how things are done and provides breakdowns for any items not specifically included in the audit. She was trying to absorb all of this and asked whether the omission meant that the board decided not to include that information. She asked if she misunderstood what the omission meant, as it implied that management made the decision not to include the supplementary information.

The councilmembers expressed their confusion by her question, so Chairwoman Fillingame suggested that General Manager Farmer should reach out to Mauldin & Jenkins directly for clarity on the issue.

Mayor Smith then referred to the minutes, which stated that General Manager Farmer had been tasked with reaching out to Mauldin & Jenkins to clarify the matter. She asked Mr. Farmer if he had done so.

Mr. Farmer confirmed that he had spoken with Mr. Carroll from Mauldin & Jenkins and mentioned that Mr. Carroll was willing to come to speak to the board to provide an update on the audit and answer any questions the board might have regarding it.

Mayor Williams agreed that it was important for Mr. Carroll to come and speak to the board to address Mayor Smith's concerns and any other questions that might arise. He emphasized that this would help Mayor Smith reach a comfortable level with the situation and ensure everyone had clarity on the issue.

General Manager Farmer responded that he had conveyed the information to Mr. Carroll and that he could have him attend the next meeting.

Mayor Smith said that someone approached one of the staff members, asking for a map of all the property that the Water Authority owned. She emphasized that while she is very approachable and easy to talk to, it was concerning that someone went through staff to ask for this information. She recalled that she had requested a list of all the properties owned by the authority during the December meeting, and Councilman Slaton had asked on her behalf. She wanted to know if there had been any progress on getting this list.

General Manager Farmer replied that he would follow up with Mr. Carroll and clarified that he was under the impression he would receive an email with the requested list of property inquiries.

Chairwoman Fillingame acknowledged that the questions raised at the previous meeting should still be addressed, and the connection between the board and project team needed to be made to ensure the questions were answered.

Mayor Smith then asked if they could also get a list of the construction projects in progress. She noted that the budget showed \$6.2 to \$6.3 million for construction in progress and about \$21.2 to \$21.3 million in interest, and she wondered if there was already an existing list detailing these projects.

Mr. Tom responded that these were likely accounting journal entries and that Dan Post, the financial advisor, would have that information.

Mayor Smith pointed out that since she had been involved, Dan Post, the financial advisor, had not attended any meetings, which led her to further question the process.

Mayor Williams clarified that Dan Post wasn't required to attend meetings regularly, but he had been handling the work needed. He explained that the authority had put out a request for a new financial manager, but there were no applicants, so Dan Post continued the work. He also mentioned that if anyone knew of a financial manager interested in the position, it was still an available opportunity.

Mayor Smith responded that she didn't know anyone personally, but then raised a concern about what would happen if Dan Post decided to leave. She asked, "What are we going to do?"

Mayor Williams explained that the goal was to keep the financial management position within the local area, but unfortunately, that effort had not worked out.

City Manager Phillips suggested that they should revisit their efforts to find a financial manager. He proposed that perhaps they could collaborate with GM Farmer to make a more targeted effort and come up with a plan before the next meeting to improve the results.

City Manager Redic inquired if there was a job description for the position.

Chairwoman Fillingame clarified that there was a scope of services for the role.

City Manager Phillips also suggested that perhaps Dan Post could provide an overview of the services he had been offering, to give a clearer picture of what the job entails.

Chairwoman Fillingame agreed, noting that she didn't think Dan Post would have an issue coming to the next meeting to provide the overview.

Mayor Smith confirmed that at the next meeting, they would receive the construction-in-progress list, and Mauldin & Jenkins would be present, to which Chairwoman Fillingame responded that Mr. Farmer would ensure everything was in place for the February meeting.

Mayor Smith raised a follow-up question regarding whether there was any documentation showing the Water Authority's purchase or possession of Palmetto's water facilities. She asked if there had been any

exchange of money, or any paperwork related to that. She also asked who the official record keeper was for the authority.

Attorney Davenport responded that the authority had had multiple people serve as record keepers over the years, with records going back to 2000. He explained that records were likely consolidated in one place now, but previously they were kept in different cities—Palmetto, Fairburn, and Union City—depending on who was managing them at the time. He added that everything related to the authority's actions had been documented, including those related to the refinancing of the bond issue. The refinancing allowed the authority to take ownership of the reservoir and water treatment plant while Palmetto's outstanding bonds were cleared, which also led to Palmetto developing a relationship with Fulton County for wastewater treatment. Attorney Davenport suggested that Ms. Davis could reach out to ensure all relevant documents were gathered and consolidated.

City Manager Phillips asked Ms. Davis if the board had previously discussed options for document storage. Ms. Davis replied that they had selected Office Depot for document storage, with a monthly payment plan. However, she clarified that she only had the documents that Councilmember Jones had given her since she started working for the authority. These were limited to what had been provided to her in meetings, and she did not have records from before her tenure.

Mayor Williams asked if anything had been transferred from Beth to Ms. Davis.

Councilmember Jones responded that the only thing that had been transferred from Beth was what he had given to Ms. Davis.

City Manager Phillips asked Councilmember Jones to clarify what had been given to Ms. Davis.

Councilmember Jones explained that three boxes, which Beth had, contained minutes from the meetings, and he had handed those over to Ms. Davis. Ms. Davis confirmed that the documents consisted of minutes, and these minutes had been uploaded to the authority's website.

City Manager Phillips summarized the situation, saying that over the years, documents had been stored in various locations depending on who was the point person at the time. He suggested that they needed to step back and figure out where all the documents were stored.

Attorney Davenport explained that the shifting of document storage locations occurred when the chairmanship changed from one mayor to the next. For example, when the Mayor of Palmetto was the chairman, the documents were kept in Palmetto. When the Mayor of Fairburn or Union City held the role, the documents would be kept in those cities. Davenport also mentioned that the documents included not only meeting minutes and agendas but also closing transcripts from bond transactions, including documents related to at least two refinancings. He emphasized that these documents might be stored in various places but that his office would likely have copies, either on CD or in hard-bound format.

Mayor Williams then asked the project managers if they had any records related to the authority. They confirmed that, over the years, they likely had at least one file cabinet full of documents.



City Manager Phillips suggested a focused and intentional effort to pull together all documents, wherever they were stored, into a single repository. This would allow them to begin cataloging and understanding what they had, particularly the transaction documents. He emphasized the need to bring some order to the documentation process.

Chairwoman Fillingame agreed, suggesting that Ms. Davis and Mr. Farmer work together to resolve this issue by bringing all the documents into one central location and creating an inventory of them.

Mayor Smith suggested that they may need to go even further to ensure thorough organization and clarity regarding the documents.

Secretary Davis clarified that she would be reaching out to the project managers, Attorney Davenport, Dan Post, and the board members to collect any documents they might have related to the authority.


City Manager Phillips asked each board member to contact their respective clerks to check for any documents related to the authority and forward them to Ms. Davis.

Attorney Davenport added that Beth Willford had kept a file cabinet of documents in Palmetto, which was later moved to Union City, and over time, documents had been stored in different locations depending on which city's mayor was the chair at the time. He reiterated that the documents had been stored across various locations due to the changes in chairmanship.

City Manager Phillips concluded by suggesting that they ask any stakeholders involved in the process to check if they had any documents related to the authority and provide them to Ms. Davis.

**VIII.** The motion to adjourn the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water & Sewer Authority Meeting at 7:47 p.m. was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Mayor Smith.

**Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried**



Sonja Fillingame, Chair



J. Davis  
Jessica Davis, Secretary

