

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

June 9th, 2026 @ 7:00 PM
City of Union City- City Hall
5047 Union Street, Union City, GA. 30268

- I.** Chairman Tony Phillips 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 Chairman Tony Phillips

The Honorable Vice-Chair Brian Jones

The Honorable Mayor Vince Williams

The Honorable Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones

The Honorable Councilwoman Jessica Wilbanks

The Honorable City Manager Jamila Criss

The following board member(s) were absent:

The Honorable Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith

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

III. Approval of Water Authority Minutes:

The motion to approve the May 12th 2026 Water Authority meeting minutes was made by Mayor Vince Williams and Councilmember Brian Jones seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried**

Chairman Tony Phillips requested that Agenda Item No. 6 be moved forward to accommodate the representatives from the Urban League of Greater Atlanta. Mayor Vince Williams made a motion to amend the agenda by moving Item No. 6 forward. The motion was seconded by Mayor Hattie Portis Jones. **Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried**

IV. Presentation:

1. Urban League of Greater Atlanta-

Representatives from the Urban League of Greater Atlanta provided an overview of the DeKalb County Water Rate Assistance Program, an initiative established in partnership with DeKalb County to assist residents impacted by the county's approved water rate increases.

The presenters explained that DeKalb County adopted a 10% annual water rate increase over a ten-year period ("10 by 10"), with the first increase implemented in August 2025. Recognizing the potential financial impact on low-income households, seniors, and residents with disabilities, the County engaged the Urban League to establish and operate an Office of Water Affordability to administer financial assistance and customer support services.

To develop the program, the Urban League conducted extensive research of similar water affordability programs across the country, including those in Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York, to identify best practices. The program uses an affordability model that compares a household's water costs to 4.5% of the household's gross income, utilizing HUD's 60% Area Median Income guidelines and income thresholds aligned with DeKalb County's existing plumbing repair assistance program.

The Office of Water Affordability officially opened on August 15, 2025, to coincide with the County's first water rate increase. Eligible residents may receive monthly bill credits for a twelve-month period based on household income, family size, and historical water usage. Participants are required to recertify annually to maintain eligibility.

Representatives highlighted the program's accessibility, noting that residents may apply online through dekalbwaterassists.org, submit paper applications by mail, or apply in person. The office is located adjacent to DeKalb County's Utility Customer Operations Center, allowing residents convenient access while paying or discussing their water bills.

The presenters also outlined the program's staffing structure, which includes a program director, data analyst, intake receptionist, customer service advocates, dispute advocates, and a marketing coordinator. In addition to administering financial assistance, the office reviews escalated customer billing disputes that have completed the County's initial dispute process.

The Urban League emphasized its ongoing outreach efforts, which include community education, partnerships with advocacy organizations, regular coordination meetings with DeKalb County staff, and public awareness campaigns to ensure eligible residents are informed of available assistance.

An important feature of the program is that eligible applicants receive temporary shutoff protection while their applications are under review. Staff have direct access to the County's billing system to review account histories, process applications, and coordinate customer assistance.

Program statistics presented indicated that, since opening in August 2025, the office has received 1,116 applications. Presenters noted that the current approval rate remains relatively low during the program's first year because many applicants are still able to afford their water bills under the current affordability formula and because numerous applications remain pending due to incomplete supporting documentation. The Urban League expects participation and approvals to increase as future water rate adjustments are implemented.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones expressed interest in the Water Rate Assistance Program and noted that she was familiar with similar initiatives implemented in other municipalities. She requested additional information regarding the partnership between DeKalb County and the Urban League of Greater Atlanta, including the contractual relationship, funding structure, and organizational responsibilities.

Representatives from the Urban League explained that program staff remain employees of the Urban League and serve as independent third-party contractors for DeKalb County. As a neutral entity, the Urban League evaluates applications, provides recommendations to the County, submits monthly reports, and periodically presents updates to the County's Finance, Audit, and Budget Committee regarding the program's progress. While recommendations are made by the Urban League, final determinations remain the responsibility of DeKalb County.

In response to questions regarding the agreement, representatives stated that the contract is evaluated annually rather than established as a ten-year agreement. They further shared that the initial annual operating budget was approximately \$1.2 million, which covered startup expenses including technology development, website creation, data management systems, staffing, and consultant support. They noted that future operating costs are expected to decrease as one-time startup expenses have already been incurred.

Mayor Portis-Jones inquired whether the \$1.2 million budget included financial assistance for residents. Representatives clarified that the amount reflected only the operational costs associated with administering the program and did not include funding designated for customer bill assistance. They noted that the funding for resident assistance was authorized through resolutions adopted by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, although they did not have the specific funding amounts available during the presentation.

Representatives further explained that DeKalb County's water rate increases were implemented in response to significant infrastructure needs and more than \$200 million in uncollected water bills. They emphasized that the County's objective was to address these financial challenges while minimizing the impact on residents through an independent affordability assistance program.

Chairman Tony Phillips asked for additional information regarding the development of the program's affordability index, specifically the basis for using 4.5% of household gross income in conjunction with 60% of the Area Median Income, and whether the methodology was developed collaboratively with County leadership. He also inquired whether the affordability model would be revisited as water rates continue to increase over the ten-year implementation period.

Representatives from the Urban League of Greater Atlanta explained that DeKalb County selected the 4.5% affordability threshold based on guidance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the percentage of household income that should reasonably be allocated to water and sewer services. They noted that while affordability models vary among municipalities, DeKalb County chose to align its eligibility criteria with the County's existing plumbing repair assistance program to provide consistency and simplify the application process for residents.

The presenters further explained that, in addition to the affordability index, DeKalb County evaluates household water consumption using a benchmark of 1,500 gallons per person, per month. Applicants' previous twelve months of water usage are reviewed to determine whether high bills are the result of financial hardship or excessive water consumption. For households exceeding the consumption threshold, the Urban League provides water conservation education and works with residents to identify potential leaks or other factors contributing to elevated usage before reassessing eligibility.

Representatives emphasized that the program extends beyond bill assistance by providing a comprehensive, wraparound approach for residents who do not qualify for financial assistance. Through individualized needs assessments, the Urban League connects residents with community resources, social services, and other assistance programs available through both the Urban League and DeKalb County.

The presentation highlighted the organization's extensive community outreach strategy, which includes partnerships with elected officials, senior centers, Parks and Recreation, school social workers, community organizations, and local media. Outreach efforts have included educational presentations, participation in community events and town halls, radio interviews, water bill inserts, digital and print advertising, and in-person application assistance to increase awareness of the program.

Representatives reported that outreach initiatives have resulted in increased community awareness and participation. They also noted that promotional efforts will continue as future water rate increases are implemented and additional residents become eligible for assistance.

The Urban League also discussed its administration of DeKalb County's formal water bill dispute escalation process, providing independent reviews of customer disputes that have completed the County's initial review process. Additionally, the organization announced that it is partnering with DeKalb County and the Legal Defense Fund to develop a water bill debt reduction and amnesty program aimed at assisting low-income residents with outstanding water bill balances. The program is expected to launch in the coming months.

The presenters concluded by reaffirming the Urban League's commitment to working collaboratively with DeKalb County, elected officials, and community partners to ensure residents have access to financial assistance, educational resources, and support services as the County continues implementing its long-term water rate adjustment plan.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones requested clarification regarding the program's shutoff protection policy and the process for restoring water service.

Representatives from the Urban League explained that DeKalb County administers water service disconnections and that the Urban League does not control that process. They noted that, while the County has operated under a temporary moratorium on shutoffs, applicants to the Water Rate Assistance Program are protected from service

disconnection while their applications are under review. Eligible applicants receive shutoff protection during the evaluation period, and approved participants remain protected throughout their twelve-month participation in the program, provided they remain current on their monthly water bills and comply with any required installment payment agreements for past-due balances.

Chairman Tony Phillips sought clarification regarding applicants who meet the income requirements but do not yet qualify for bill credits under the affordability threshold. Representatives explained that applicants receive protection during the evaluation process, which is governed by a 90-day service level agreement, although most applications are processed within approximately one month. They further noted that the program was designed to address future water rate increases rather than eliminate existing delinquent balances, making participation in installment payment agreements an important program requirement.

City Manager Jamila Criss inquired about the reapplication process for residents determined to be ineligible. Representatives advised that residents may reapply after one year. She also confirmed that participants receiving assistance are required to pay both their current monthly water charges and any agreed-upon installment payments toward past-due balances to remain in good standing and continue receiving program benefits.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked whether the current application numbers accurately reflected community need, suggesting that many residents may require assistance but choose not to apply because they assume they are ineligible. Representatives responded that they believe the primary challenge is public awareness rather than eligibility. They explained that outreach efforts consistently generate increases in applications and that applicant information is maintained in the program's customer management system, allowing eligible households to be contacted if additional assistance programs become available.

Councilmember Jones further observed that public awareness of the County's long-term water rate increases could generate significant community interest in available assistance programs. Representatives agreed and noted that they are expanding outreach through targeted social media campaigns, geographic marketing, water bill inserts, community presentations, and partnerships with local governments and organizations to reach residents most likely to benefit.

Chairman Tony Phillips asked whether the Urban League had identified which outreach strategies were proving most effective. Representatives stated that it is still too early to determine the effectiveness of individual marketing efforts, as many campaigns—including water bill inserts and targeted advertising—were recently launched following the second scheduled water rate increase. They indicated that program staff are actively monitoring application data and campaign analytics to evaluate outreach effectiveness and refine future engagement strategies.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones asked whether the Urban League of Greater Atlanta plans to expand or replicate the Water Rate Assistance Program in other jurisdictions.

Representatives responded that the organization has already shared its program model with other municipalities, including Rockdale County, and continues to collaborate with peer organizations in cities such as Philadelphia and Baltimore to identify and implement best practices. They expressed a strong interest in expanding the program throughout the metropolitan Atlanta region as communities continue addressing aging water infrastructure and increasing utility costs.

The presenters emphasized that the Urban League views water affordability as an increasingly important issue and believes its independent, third-party model provides municipalities with a valuable resource for administering assistance programs while maintaining public trust. They reiterated the organization's commitment to helping local governments balance infrastructure investment with affordability for residents and welcomed opportunities to partner with additional communities in the future.

Representatives concluded by thanking the Authority for the opportunity to present and expressed their willingness to return to provide additional information or discuss potential partnerships.

Chairman Tony Phillips thanked the Urban League representatives for their informative presentation and acknowledged the importance of water affordability as infrastructure costs continue to rise throughout the region. He noted that the Authority looks forward to continuing the dialogue on strategies to support residents while addressing future water system needs.

V. Discussion & Approval:

1. MCRWSA Metro Atlanta Regional Water Policy Roundtable in Savannah

• Agenda/ Formal Invitation-

Chairman Tony Phillips reviewed the revised agenda for the upcoming Metro Atlanta Regional Water Policy Roundtable, noting that the latest draft incorporated feedback received from Mayor Vince Williams and the project managers.

Chairman Phillips also reported that Danny Johnson from the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) had confirmed ARC's participation in the roundtable.

Councilmember Brian Jones inquired about the Authority's marketing and outreach strategy to encourage attendance. Board members discussed revisions to the promotional flyer, and Secretary Jessica Davis was directed to make the necessary updates.

Mayor Vince Williams reported that GMA had requested a brief program synopsis for the convention schedule. He shared the proposed description, explaining that the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water and Sewer Authority, representing the Cities of Fairburn, Palmetto, and Union City, would host an informational meeting focused on regional water challenges, water availability, aging infrastructure, and future water and wastewater needs. He noted that the purpose of the meeting is to identify interested partners and establish the foundation for future regional collaboration.

The Board discussed strategies for promoting the event, including distributing invitations to municipalities and water authorities throughout the Atlanta Regional Commission service area. Councilmember Jones suggested utilizing the GMA attendee database where appropriate, while Mayor Williams recommended leveraging existing municipal email distribution lists to reach regional stakeholders.

Chairman Phillips stated that he would contact the Atlanta Regional Commission to determine whether ARC could assist with distributing the invitation to municipalities within the metropolitan region. Councilmember Jones noted that ARC maintains contact information for jurisdictions throughout the twenty-county metropolitan statistical area.

Additional promotional ideas included utilizing social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as each member city's official communication channels. Attorney Dennis Davenport suggested placing promotional materials at the GMA registration area if permitted, while Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones recommended distributing printed handouts to conference attendees throughout the convention to encourage participation.

• Scope of Work-

Councilmember Brian Jones requested clarification regarding the distribution plan, specifically whether the RFP would also be posted on each member city's procurement or bid platform in addition to the Authority's website.

Chairman Tony Phillips confirmed that the RFP would be posted on each member city's bid platform and that proposal submissions would be received through the Authority's designated email address.

Councilmember Jones reviewed the proposed procurement schedule, recommending issuance of the RFP the following day, written questions due by June 17, responses to questions issued by June 24, and proposals due by July 7 at 3:00 p.m. He noted that this timeline would allow proposal materials to be distributed to the Board in advance of its next meeting.

VI. Reports:

1. Water Attorney Report-

Attorney Dennis Davenport presented an update on the Authority's six-month water consumption allocation and cost-sharing schedule. He reported that the updated percentages for each member city had been completed using the most recent consumption data and noted that the process was more efficient due to the consistent monthly submission of information by each city.

Attorney Davenport stated that he will continue requesting monthly invoices from each member city to streamline future six-month calculations and eliminate the need to compile data at the end of each reporting period.

He reviewed the consumption summary, which reflects each city's monthly water usage from November through April, allowing the Board to monitor usage trends over time. Beginning with the next reporting period, Attorney Davenport indicated that he intends to provide a simplified one-page monthly consumption report to assist member cities in tracking usage patterns and preparing for future financial obligations.

Attorney Davenport reported that the updated allocation resulted in Palmetto's percentage increasing, while the percentages for Fairburn and Union City decreased, reflecting recent changes in water consumption among the member cities.

He also informed the Board that an issue had been identified with the conversion of water usage from CCF (hundred cubic feet) to gallons on certain invoices received from the City of Atlanta. To improve accuracy, the Authority elected to perform its own conversion by multiplying the verified CCF totals by 748 gallons per CCF, resulting in a more reliable calculation of each city's water consumption and corresponding financial responsibility.

Attorney Davenport reviewed the current deposit schedule and advised that a payment from Union City may have been delayed due to a check that was lost in the mail. He stated that he is working with Union City staff to resolve the issue and recommended transitioning to electronic wire transfers, similar to the process currently utilized by the City of Fairburn, to reduce the risk of future payment delays.

He also noted that Palmetto's account reflected recent fluctuations and encouraged continued communication to ensure all member cities remain current with their financial obligations.

Attorney Davenport reminded the Board that the monthly allocation schedule directly supports the Authority's debt service obligations, including principal and interest payments, and emphasized the importance of timely reporting and payments from each member city.

He concluded by commending the member cities for their cooperation and improved communication throughout the reporting process. Attorney Davenport encouraged Board members and municipal staff to contact him with any questions regarding the allocation schedules, invoices, or consumption reports and emphasized the value of maintaining transparency by allowing each member city to understand regional water consumption trends.

2. Financial Manager

Attorney Davenport presented Requisition #292 for the Board's consideration in the amount of \$11,461.20.

A motion to approve Requisition #292 was made by Mayor Portis-Jones and seconded by Councilmember Jones.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

Attorney Davenport presented Requisition #293 for the Board's consideration in the amount of \$392,112.50.

A motion to approve Requisition #293 was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by City Manager Criss.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

3. Project Managers:

The Project Managers commended the Urban League of Greater Atlanta for its presentation on the DeKalb County Water Rate Assistance Program and noted that the information could provide valuable insight for the individual member cities, although the program would not directly apply to the Authority in its role as a wholesale water supplier.

Additional discussion clarified that the financial assistance provided through the DeKalb County program is funded by DeKalb County as authorized through the County's enabling resolutions, rather than through grant funding. Chairman Tony Phillips and City Manager Jamila Criss discussed the potential scalability of similar programs and observed that utility enterprise funding may provide a mechanism for supporting such initiatives.

The Project Managers also reported that the annual invoice from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) had been received in the amount of \$15,800. Because the invoice arrived after the Board packet had been distributed, it was not included on the meeting agenda. The Board was advised that approval during the current meeting would allow payment to be prepared for execution at the July meeting while ensuring the Authority meets the invoice due date of August 7.

Councilmember Jones made a motion to approve payment of the USGS invoice in the amount of \$15,800. The motion was seconded by Mayor Williams.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

1. Water Update-

The Project Managers announced that water audits will begin in July. Notifications and scheduling information will be distributed to member city staff via email.

2. GIS Program Update-

The Project Managers reported that no member cities expressed interest in participating in the GIS Program offered through Kennesaw State University. Accordingly, they will assume there is no interest in pursuing that opportunity unless otherwise directed by the Board.

The Board was reminded of the upcoming Georgia Tech Capstone Program, which is expected to solicit project proposals in early July. Because proposal deadlines will occur before the Authority's next regular meeting, Board members were encouraged to begin identifying potential projects over the next thirty days. The Project Managers advised that, once the solicitation is received, it will be distributed promptly to the Board along with submission requirements to allow sufficient time for consideration.

3. Carl Vinson Institute-

The Project Managers provided an update regarding discussions with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government concerning the rate comparison dashboard available through the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA). They reported that the existing dashboard has limited analytical capabilities and cannot be customized to compare member city water rates with those of other metropolitan utilities or generate the type of comparative analysis previously discussed by the Board.

The Project Managers indicated that more advanced analysis would likely require a separate study or partnership, such as through the Georgia Tech Capstone Program.

The Project Managers also reported that representatives from the Carl Vinson Institute expressed interest in the Authority's regional water collaboration efforts. During discussions, the conversation expanded beyond the dashboard to include the upcoming Metro Atlanta Regional Water Policy Roundtable and the potential for a broader regional water summit following the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) Annual Convention.

Representatives from the Carl Vinson Institute indicated that the organization has extensive experience facilitating regional government collaborations, conducting research, and documenting multi-jurisdictional initiatives. They expressed interest in supporting future regional water discussions should the Authority determine, that continued facilitation would be beneficial.

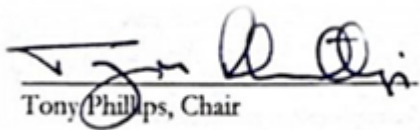
Chairman Tony Phillips asked whether the appropriate time to engage the Carl Vinson Institute would be following a successful Regional Water Policy Roundtable in Savannah. The Project Managers agreed that feedback from the GMA event would help determine the level of regional interest and whether a partnership with the Carl Vinson Institute would add value by facilitating future discussions and helping the Authority develop tangible regional initiatives.

VII. Other Business

VIII. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mayor Vince Williams and seconded by Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried



Tony Phillips, Chair



J. Davis
Jessica Davis, Secretary