

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water And Sewer Authority Meeting

August 12th, 2025 @ 7:00 PM
City of Union City- City Hall
5047 Union Street, Union City, GA 30291

- 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 Councilman Brian Jones
The Honorable Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith The Honorable City Manager Tony Phillips

The following members were absent:
The Honorable Vice-Chair Mario Avery
The Honorable Councilman Nathan Slaton (Councilman Deon Arnold attended on his behalf)

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

III. Approval of Water Authority Minutes:

A motion to approve the July 8th, 2025, MCRWSA was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by City Manager Phillips. **Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried**

IV. Discussion & Approval

V. Reports:

1. Authority Attorney

Attorney Davenport noted that Secretary Jessica provided him with the January 2024 minutes, which confirmed that the Secretary/Treasurer position was unanimously voted to Mayor Vince Williams. Since Mayor Williams was the Secretary in 2024, if the signature card has not been replaced, he may still be authorized to sign checks. Attorney Davenport asked if the Authority was willing to proceed in that manner. The alternative would be to wait until Friday for Mayor Avery to sign. Attorney Davenport explained that there was no clear record of the card being updated, and therefore Mayor Williams could sign the checks if it's the pleasure of the board. The board agreed.

2. Financial Manager

Attorney Davenport presented Requisition #280 in the amount of \$26,296.55 for approval.

Councilman Jones inquired about the frequency of payments to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The project managers confirmed that this is an annual payment covered under an existing contract.

The motion to approve requisition #280 was made by Councilmember Jones and seconded by City Manager Phillips. **Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried**

3. Project Managers:

A. USGS Invoice

Project Manager Benz confirmed that the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) invoice included in the packet has been authorized by the Board. This payment will cover the annual obligation.

B. GEFA Loan Closeout

Project Manager Benz reported that the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) contacted the Authority about closing out a loan. Since the Authority will no longer be pursuing the loan, GEFA requested authorization to debit the remaining balance of \$9,207.07 (including interest) directly from the account they already have access to. This withdrawal is scheduled for the 15th, the date GEFA normally drafts payments.

- C. Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith stated that GEFA sent the invoice to the City of Palmetto and attempted to draft funds from Palmetto's general fund. The City Manager identified the issue. Project Manager Benz explained to Mayor Smith that this occurred because all related correspondence was being directed to Palmetto.

A motion to authorize GEFA to debit the account in the amount of \$9,207.07 to close out the loan was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilman Jones.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

D. Water Withdrawal Permits

Project Manager Benz noted that the annual and five-year water withdrawal reports were due July 27. Reports for Union City and Fairburn were submitted on Monday, July 28, which was acceptable since the 27th fell on a Sunday. The project managers coordinated with Palmetto regarding their report, as revisions were requested. EPD has been notified, and Palmetto's submission will be filed once revisions are complete.

E. Mitigation Credits

Project Manager Benz provided an update on mitigation credits. There has been a slight delay in the release schedule, and the anticipated availability for sale is now projected for the second quarter of 2026. Royalties from those sales should begin once the credits are released.

F. Bear Creek Reservoir

Project Manager Benz reminded the Board that the Bear Creek Reservoir remains listed with an asterisk in the Water District Plan as a potential project. Updates to the plan are scheduled for 2028, and the metro district will soon begin issuing RFPs for consultants. Project Manager Benz emphasized the importance of continued Board discussions regarding whether and how to pursue water development so the reservoir remains a viable option in the district plan.

G. Meeting with Commissioner Earley

Following the Board's direction to pursue a top-down approach, Mayor Williams facilitated a meeting with Commissioner Earley and Atlanta representatives on August 5. The purpose was to explore potential synergies and partnerships for addressing regional water needs. Commissioner Earley was receptive, though no commitments were made. Project Manager Benz expressed appreciation to Mayor Williams for his leadership in securing the meeting.

Tom Owens prepared a letter with key talking points from the discussion, and presented those details to the Board. He reported on the recent meeting with Atlanta officials, attended by Chairwoman Fillingame, Mayor Williams, and himself. He stated that the meeting went very well, and that Atlanta's representatives requested a written outline summarizing the Authority's overarching framework and goals. Mr. Owens clarified that no detailed proposals were made; rather, the discussion centered on broad principles for potential collaboration.

Authority's Core Challenge

Mr. Owens emphasized that one of the Authority's greatest challenges is the lack of revenue, as it currently does not produce wholesale water. He explained that the Authority's mission is to produce and sell wholesale water to its member cities, similar to how Atlanta and Coweta charge their customers.

Concept Framework

Mr. Owens outlined a potential framework for future partnership with Atlanta:

- The Authority would assume ownership of transmission assets located within the member cities' limits.
- This transfer would relieve Atlanta of the maintenance and operational costs for those assets.
- In exchange, the Authority would purchase wholesale water from Atlanta, then resell it to member cities with a modest markup to cover costs.
- The phased approach would allow the Authority to build revenue streams, gain borrowing capacity, and control improvements within its own service area.

Mr. Owens noted this arrangement would give the Authority a stronger role in managing water resources, while Atlanta would maintain its wholesale customers without bearing local infrastructure costs.

Mayor Smith raised concerns that the transmission lines from Atlanta stop at the northern edge of Palmetto and do not extend into the city where service is most needed. She stressed that equity must be considered so Palmetto has a fair opportunity to benefit.

Mr. Owens acknowledged the concern, explaining that if the Authority controlled the lines, it could potentially extend them into Palmetto. While the technical feasibility would need engineering review, such ownership would at least provide the Authority with the option of expansion, something it currently does not have. He cautioned that extending service would require funding and infrastructure analysis but reiterated that this framework offers more control than the current arrangement.

Financial Considerations

Mr. Owens discussed the financial implications:

- If the Authority were to construct its own reservoir and infrastructure, the projected cost would exceed \$160 million before any member city connections.
- Without revenue, the Authority currently lacks the ability to borrow funds or finance projects.
- By becoming a wholesale purchaser from Atlanta and reselling water, the Authority would gain borrowing capacity and a sustainable revenue model.
- He cautioned that water costs could rise significantly if the Authority pursued independent projects without alternative funding.

City Manager Phillips observed that Atlanta has signaled its intent to revisit wholesale rate structures, which may impact future costs. Mr. Owens responded that Atlanta could create a new customer class for the Authority, but emphasized that water access remains limited and costly without negotiation.

Mayor Williams stated that the meeting with Atlanta was productive, Commissioner Earley was engaged, and the conversation opened important opportunities for the future, though no commitments were made.

Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith reiterated concerns about Palmetto being excluded and emphasized the importance of including provisions for equitable access.

City Manager Phillips described the framework as an interesting alternative worth exploring, noting that engineering studies will be critical to determine feasibility.

Councilman Jones compared the concept to GDOT's practice of shifting local maintenance responsibility to municipalities, noting the potential for cost savings and local control.

Mr. Owens concluded that the meeting with Atlanta presented a creative alternative that could benefit both sides:

- Atlanta would reduce maintenance responsibilities in the southern region of the county.
- The Authority would gain control, revenue, and borrowing capacity to address local water needs.
- The potential exists for future joint development of reservoirs or infrastructure.

Mayor Williams summarized that the Board should remain open to continued dialogue with Atlanta, explore the framework further, and wait for Atlanta's follow-up before making any decisions.

VI. Other Business

- Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith introduced the OWL, a 360-degree camera capable of capturing the entire meeting and live streaming. She explained that although she brought the device, it was not compatible with her personal laptop. She intends to bring it back for the next meeting with the proper equipment.

Mayor Williams raised concerns about technical readiness, stating that if meetings are to be live-streamed, they should be held in a location with IT support. He suggested it may be more practical to conduct streaming from a city facility that already has the capability.

City Manager Phillips asked whether the Board had formally decided to live-stream meetings.

Chairwoman Fillingame clarified that no such decision has been made.

City Manager Phillips noted that Fairburn has the technical ability to stream meetings and offered to coordinate support if the Board chooses to proceed. However, he emphasized the need for Board consensus on issues such as the platform, website, or social media channels to be used.

Mayor Williams reiterated that Union City does not yet have streaming capability but expressed openness to the idea in the future.

- Mayor Smith emphasized the importance of keeping the Authority's website current and stated that she did not see the audits on the website. She also asked Attorney Davenport how customers could reach him, noting that only his phone number is currently listed on the site.

Secretary Davis clarified that the website is up to date, with the exception of information regarding the Rosales Group that Mayor Smith was supposed to provide. She further explained that audits have never been published on the website. The "Contact Us" form on the site is functional; when customers submit inquiries, she receives the notifications and forwards them to Attorney Davenport.

Attorney Davenport added that members of the public can also call the number listed on the website, where his secretary will answer and relay messages.

Mayor Smith acknowledged that some updates may still be pending in her drafts, specifically the Rosales Group information she was responsible for submitting to Secretary Davis. She reported that budget funding has now been approved for her to hire an assistant, which should help ensure timely submission of website updates moving forward.

VII. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water & Sewer Authority Meeting at 8:05 p.m. was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Mayor Smith.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried



Sonja Fillingame, Chair



J. Davis
Jessica Davis, Secretary