

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water And Sewer Authority Meeting

December 9th, 2025 @ 7:00 PM
City of Fairburn- City Hall
56 Malone Street S.W. 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 Councilman Nathan Slaton
The Honorable Councilman Brian Jones The Honorable Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith

The following board members were absent during roll call:
The Honorable Vice Chair Mayor Mario Avery- arrived at 7:10 p.m.
The Honorable City Manager Tony Phillips

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

III. Approval of Water Authority Minutes:

The motion to approve the November 13th, 2025, MCRWSA was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilman Slaton. **Vote: 5-0; Motion Carried**

IV. Approval of Water Authority Audit:

The motion to approve the 2024 audit was made by Councilmember Brian Jones and seconded by Mayor Vince Williams. **Vote: 5-0; Motion Carried**

V. Presentation:

Mr. Hamilton Holmes introduced himself for the record and noted that he works with an architectural design firm that has completed recent projects in Fairburn and Union City. He stated that, although his firm has not yet had the opportunity to work with the City of Palmetto, he hopes to do so in the future.

Mr. Holmes explained that he was present to introduce Sustainability Partners and their representative, Mr. Eric Street. He shared that he met Mr. Street approximately a year and a half ago while working with a mutual client, and that he often seeks to connect professionals and resources that may benefit local governments.

Mr. Holmes emphasized his longstanding ties to the South Fulton and Southwest Atlanta communities and expressed his desire to see the jurisdiction succeed, particularly regarding ongoing water-related challenges. He noted that following discussions at the September Board meeting concerning potential facility development, he believed Sustainability Partners could serve as a beneficial resource.

Ms. Carla addressed the Board on behalf of Sustainability Partners and its representatives, Mr. Eric Street and Mr. Carson. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to present.

Ms. Carla provided an overview of her professional background, noting prior work in federal policy on Capitol Hill and later in public works administration for the City of Jackson, Mississippi. She explained that during her tenure in Jackson she oversaw the business operations of the water and sewer system during a period of infrastructure decline, describing how lack of maintenance contributed to system failure

and eventual federal receivership. She currently consults as Chief Revenue Officer for the City of Jackson's water system while also working with Sustainability Partners.

Ms. Carla stated that Sustainability Partners is a public benefit company founded in 2016 and headquartered in Chandler, Arizona. The firm develops and maintains essential infrastructure for municipalities, universities, hospitals, and states, with approximately 55 completed projects currently under maintenance and hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure under development. She noted that their project portfolio spans multiple asset types, including water systems, wastewater, lighting, electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, microgrids, athletics fields, and other critical facilities.

Ms. Carla discussed common challenges associated with water infrastructure nationwide, explaining that deferred maintenance is often caused by changing administrations and shifting priorities, leaving ratepayers to bear long-term costs. She described Sustainability Partners' model as a means to maintain asset quality, reduce lifecycle costs, and lessen the burden of capital replacement.

Ms. Carla outlined the firm's financing structure, stating that projects may be developed with zero upfront capital to the municipality or utility. Under the model, Sustainability Partners funds, installs, and owns the asset while the utility operates it and remits monthly usage-based payments. Maintenance, replacement, and lifecycle capital injections are built into the monthly rate. Contracts may be terminated with 30 days' notice and do not affect credit ratings. She emphasized that the structure is intended to be flexible, and that grant funding or federal funds can be blended into project development where applicable.

Ms. Carla noted that Sustainability Partners maintains strong vendor relationships nationwide and currently services projects across multiple states. She stated that the firm aims to serve as a long-term utility partner and assumes significant operational and maintenance responsibility over the life of the assets.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked for clarification regarding the scope of infrastructure that would be required should the Authority move forward with a new water treatment facility. He noted that treatment capacity, distribution lines, and the ability to serve one or multiple jurisdictions would all need to operate simultaneously and questioned how such costs would be packaged and billed.

In response, representatives from Sustainability Partners explained that multiple infrastructure components (including the plant and distribution lines) would be coordinated as part of a comprehensive solution. They stated that different assets within a project may have varying useful life expectancies and financial structures. Planning efforts would include asset management strategies and system mapping to ensure system functionality and to avoid additional operational burdens. Representatives also emphasized that robust planning would be required to ensure that the solution provided value and met community needs.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith expressed enthusiasm for the presentation and noted that the information provided offered hope for the Authority's long-term water challenges. She requested clarification regarding ownership and integration of existing facilities, specifically referencing Palmetto's current water treatment plant. She questioned whether such a facility would be decommissioned, upgraded, or maintained under a future project model, and how such decisions would affect city-owned assets.

Ms. Carla responded that those determinations would require engineering and consultant assessment. She noted that under certain circumstances, an existing plant could be decommissioned and repurposed as a pump station, resulting in operational and ratepayer savings. She referenced similar actions being taken in Jackson, Mississippi, where consolidation of plants reduced operational burdens and improved system performance. She offered to examine the matter further if provided additional detail from the Authority.

Councilmember Nathan Slaton requested clarification regarding future rate-setting once a facility is operational, asking whether the Water Authority would continue to set rates for participating municipalities.

Ms. Carla affirmed that Sustainability Partners would not engage in political, operational, or policy decision-making and that all rate-setting authority would remain with the Water Authority. She added that rates would need to be sufficient to sustain operations and future maintenance.

Councilmember Slaton noted that the City of Palmetto currently relies minimally on Atlanta water (limited to certain warehouse accounts) and expressed concern about the potential impact on local rate structures. He also referenced Jackson, Mississippi's experience and asked whether Sustainability Partners is currently being utilized there.

Ms. Carla confirmed that Sustainability Partners is engaged in Jackson and explained that following a failed \$69 million meter installation effort in 2024, the city transitioned to Sustainability Partners to replace its metering system with no upfront capital. She stated that the upgraded metering provided accurate water usage and loss data, enhanced leak detection, and improved operational decision-making.

Councilmember Slaton questioned how locally available capital, bond proceeds, or other funding sources would integrate with Sustainability Partners' model and whether such financing could be blended. Ms. Carla responded that blended capital structures are possible but would require further evaluation of the specific capital sources and project scope.

Councilmember Slaton concluded by asking how future monthly payments would be allocated to participating cities and whether such payments would supplement or replace current Authority contributions. He stated that understanding such financial impacts is a key consideration for the City of Palmetto.

Chairwoman Sonja Fillingame noted that current Authority payments are primarily tied to debt service.

Ms. Carla stated that Sustainability Partners has the ability to pay off existing debt if doing so would be advantageous to the Authority. She explained that such debt could be rolled into a consolidated project payment, allowing the Authority to have a single obligation. She indicated that this would require further discussion.

Mayor Mario Avery requested an overview of the decommissioning process used in Jackson, Mississippi.

Ms. Carla explained that prior to decommissioning an existing plant, the primary facility must first be stabilized and upgraded. She noted that once operational needs are met, decommissioning is largely procedural, as water systems are interconnected. In Jackson, the former plant will be converted into a pump station rather than a treatment facility.

Chairwoman Fillingame stated that to Councilmembers Slaton and Jones' earlier points, member cities are concerned about the combined financial burden of usage-based billing, existing debt service, and the cost of system connections. She emphasized that the Authority must understand how such costs would affect ratepayers and what increases may be required to make a project financially viable.

Ms. Carla acknowledged ratepayer concerns and recommended that the Authority consider working with the Water Finance Network, a nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance, rate studies, and

consolidation studies for utilities nationwide. She stated that such studies may be available at no cost and could help determine capital improvement needs and ratepayer impacts.

Chairwoman Fillingame reiterated that ratepayer impacts remain the Authority's foremost concern. She noted that ratepayers must continue to fund existing debt service, incur usage-based charges, and finance individual tap/connection costs at the municipal level—representing significant combined financial obligations.

Councilmember Slaton asked for clarification regarding overall fees associated with Sustainability Partners' model.

Ms. Carla explained that Sustainability Partners earns approximately 80 basis points on projects, though the exact amount depends on project scale and various financial factors. She stated that further evaluation of the proposed project would be required before providing specific figures.

Councilmember Slaton expressed concern about maintaining reasonable rates, emphasizing that Palmetto has a large senior citizen population and that affordability is a key consideration. He asked how the Authority's existing rate study would interact with future rate models.

Project Manager Andrea Gray noted that consultant Tom Owens previously performed a rate analysis reflecting tax-exempt bond financing. Under that model, projected rates for the withdrawal project equated to approximately \$10 per 1,000 gallons—roughly double current rates. Project Manager Gray stated that Mr. Owens asked Sustainability Partners how their model could provide improved rates given the Authority's ability to utilize tax-exempt bonds. According to Project Manager Gray, Sustainability Partners responded that improved flexibility and ramp-up structures could lessen early-stage rate burdens and increase payments later as customer bases expand. Project Manager Gray concluded that determining whether the model places the Authority in a better financial position remains a central question.

Project Manager Laura Benz noted that one of the initial discussions with Sustainability Partners centered on metering and data collection. She stated that the meters referenced in the presentation could provide more accurate information on water usage and potential system losses. Project Manager Benz suggested that the Authority could consider initiating smaller city-specific projects—such as meter deployment—prior to pursuing a full-scale facility and distribution project. She added that the Authority's direct withdrawal permit contains a requirement to decommission the Palmetto plant, which would have individual impacts on member cities and should be considered in planning.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that the City of Palmetto recently upgraded its meters to automatic meter-reading technology and asked whether such infrastructure could be integrated into Sustainability Partners' model without requiring additional replacement.

Ms. Carla responded that if existing meters are accurately measuring consumption, they would not need replacement. She stated that Sustainability Partners could supplement existing meters in other areas and still retrieve meaningful data. She noted that determining meter type and capabilities would be beneficial in assessing system needs and added that accurate consumption data helps utilities evaluate supply, purchasing, and potential transitions from wholesale purchasing to self-sustaining production.

Ms. Carla reiterated her offer to connect the Authority with the Water Finance Network, which could assist in evaluating rate impacts, consolidation considerations, and project feasibility across the three cities.

Mayor Thomas-Smith asked for clarification regarding Sustainability Partners' reference to "management" and whether such functions would operate alongside or replace existing utility management structures.

Ms. Carla clarified that the reference was to maintenance management, not operational management. She stated that project participants are assigned an infrastructure specialist responsible for ensuring assets function properly and that manufacturer maintenance schedules are followed. She stressed that Sustainability Partners does not operate utilities or engage in policy decisions; operational authority remains with the governing entity.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked about the lifecycle of a water treatment facility and whether the useful life corresponds to long-term financing horizons. He compared financing to a 30-year mortgage, noting that financing beyond an asset's useful life could require multiple replacements.

Ms. Carla responded that treatment facilities consist of numerous system components with varying useful lives. She stated that Sustainability Partners accounts for ongoing replacement of short-life components—such as membranes—within the financial model, while long-life components (e.g., structural housings) may have 70–75 year lifespans. She noted that multiple replacement cycles may be built into the monthly cost to ensure continued functionality.

Mayor Vince Williams thanked Ms. Carla and Sustainability Partners for the presentation. He stated that he had previously been briefed on the model and believed it offered potential hope for addressing long-term challenges. Mayor Williams noted that additional information and due diligence would be necessary and echoed concerns raised by fellow members regarding the financial impact to individual customers, particularly seniors and low-income residents. He emphasized that while the model may provide a path forward, affordability remains a critical factor. Mayor Williams also thanked Mr. Hamilton Holmes for facilitating the introduction.

Mayor Mario Avery asked how decommissioning affects ongoing system operations, noting that in Jackson the plant is being decommissioned but still remains in functional use. He requested clarification on the practical impacts of such a transition.

Project Manager Benz explained that the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) included decommissioning of the Palmetto plant as a condition in the direct withdrawal permit. She stated that permit approvals are based on demonstrated need, and at the time the permit was issued, the Palmetto reservoir was deemed to have reduced production capacity and was not projected to remain a viable long-term water source. Under the permit structure, water demand for Palmetto would be supplied through direct withdrawal rather than the existing reservoir system.

Mayor Avery raised concerns regarding scenarios where lack of maintenance, negligence, or failure to fulfill warranty-like responsibilities could impact long-term outcomes. He asked how Sustainability Partners anticipates handling such obligations.

Ms. Carla stated that most operational maintenance remains the responsibility of the utility through its existing operational agreements. She clarified that Sustainability Partners performs scheduled maintenance required by manufacturers and replaces assets when components fail. She cited Jackson's meter replacement as an example of how data-driven maintenance and upgrades can significantly improve system performance and financial accountability.

Councilmember Nathan Slaton stated that during his research on Sustainability Partners he noted legal challenges in Illinois and other jurisdictions and asked whether such issues were state-specific or related to municipal procurement.

Ms. Carla responded that procurement rules vary by state and municipality. She noted that litigation is not uncommon for disruptive business models and stated that such matters are often driven by competing legal and financial interests. She offered to research and provide answers to any specific cases or concerns council members may identify.

Councilmember Slaton stated that his initial impression is that the legal matters appeared to involve state-level processes rather than direct disputes between cities and Sustainability Partners.

Ms. Carla agreed and noted that disruption in the market can lead to litigation pressure from stakeholders opposed to changes in procurement and financing models. She reiterated that Sustainability Partners will research any specific legal questions submitted by the Authority.

VI. Discussion & Approval:

▪ Contributions Report

Attorney Dennis Davenport

Attorney Davenport provided a report regarding contribution and payment allocations among the three member cities. He stated that following the prior meeting he assembled information to better understand timing of payments, allocation methodology, and the current financial position of each city with respect to the Authority's debt service obligations.

Attorney Davenport distributed a narrative entitled Contributions Analysis dated December 2, 2025, summarizing how contributions were established, why they were structured as such, and how allocations were intended to function. He noted that the Authority does not produce water but maintains significant debt service obligations, and that the cities historically agreed to allocate debt service based on each city's percentage of water usage. The total annual debt service target is approximately \$3 million, with monthly collections of approximately \$255,000.

Attorney Davenport explained that usage percentages have fluctuated over time due to development and demand shifts among the member cities; therefore, usage percentages are recalculated every six months. He noted that this methodology has generally worked since debt service began.

Using the most recent approved audit as a starting point (December 31, 2024), which reflected receivables owed from each city to the Authority, Attorney Davenport conducted a month-by-month reconciliation from January 2024 through October 2025. He stated that the analysis relied on data prepared every six months by Post and Associates, which receives usage volumes from each city and calculates the corresponding percentage and monthly contribution amount.

Based on this reconciliation, preliminary numbers showed:

- Union City shortfall: \$30,193
- Fairburn surplus: \$223,324
- Palmetto shortfall: \$303,675.05

Attorney Davenport stated that the Palmetto figure was revised after discovering that a September 2024 deposit was initially omitted. After correcting for that deposit and adjusting for a separate \$17,000

discrepancy, the revised Palmetto shortfall is \$249,894. He noted that he anticipates confirming this number after further review with Palmetto.

He further explained that Fairburn's surplus was largely attributable to personnel turnover and communication gaps regarding updated percentage allocations. At one point, communications were sent to a Fairburn staff member who was no longer responsible for remitting payments, resulting in payments being made using outdated percentages. That issue has been corrected, and Fairburn is now paying the proper amounts.

Attorney Davenport stated that the term "invoice" is somewhat misleading, noting that no formal invoicing or billing process currently exists. Instead, usage data is sent every six months to Post and Associates, resulting in significant delays and limited ability to identify discrepancies in real time. He recommended transitioning to monthly reporting and establishing a uniform submission date for all three cities.

He further recommended that monthly submissions include consistent source documentation. For Union City and Fairburn, he advised submitting monthly purchase invoices from Atlanta or future wholesale suppliers, as wholesale purchase volumes most accurately reflect total usage regardless of post-purchase distribution, loss, or internal consumption. He emphasized that leakage, unbilled municipal accounts, and other post-purchase destinations do not alter volume purchased and should not complicate reporting.

For Palmetto, he recommended submitting monthly production data from its water treatment plant as well as any wholesale purchase invoices from Coweta County. He stated that production volumes should be treated as equivalent to wholesale purchases for the purpose of allocating usage.

Attorney Davenport concluded that a monthly gross-volume reporting model would produce more accurate and timely contribution calculations, reduce reconciliation delays, and provide earlier visibility into anomalies, such as sudden spikes or declines in usage.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith thanked Attorney Davenport for the report and stated that the analysis would be helpful in organizing processes among the three cities. She asked whether, if the Authority agrees with the proposed reporting model, the information could be distributed to city managers and city administrators so they may begin preparing internal procedures for implementation. She further asked whether monthly reporting would generate a monthly bill or statement that could be directed to the appropriate city personnel. Mayor Thomas-Smith noted that staff turnover has impacted institutional knowledge and that consistent billing or reporting would help ensure continuity.

Attorney Dennis Davenport stated that his purpose in presenting the analysis in its current form was to gauge the Authority's reaction and to determine whether members wished to adopt such a structure. If the Authority supports the proposed model, Attorney Davenport stated he would prepare a template to communicate with the three cities and establish the new reporting process. He emphasized that the system would be transparent, with monthly submissions sent not only to Post & Associates but also to designated representatives from each city to ensure shared access to information and proactive problem identification.

Attorney Davenport explained that while Post & Associates may not generate formal invoices, monthly usage allocations and payment expectations would be clearly documented, allowing each city to remit consistent payments. He added that monthly reporting would allow immediate follow-up if submissions are not received and suggested incorporating a monthly report into future Authority agendas to maintain visibility and accountability.

Mayor Thomas-Smith asked whether these responsibilities could fall under a general manager position if the Authority were to hire one instead of contracting administrative functions. She noted that such a role could ensure continuous oversight as the Authority expands operationally.

Attorney Davenport stated that the Authority has not previously hired a general manager, as the Authority does not yet produce water, employ staff, or maintain physical assets. He stated that current responsibilities mainly involve financial obligations and monitoring contributions, functions that can be self-managed under a structured reporting process. He noted that a general manager would likely be necessary once the Authority begins construction, develops product, and employs personnel.

Attorney Davenport concluded that, based on member feedback, he will draft a formal plan outlining the proposed monthly reporting and allocation structure. He recommended bringing the plan to the January meeting for consideration and potential action, allowing the Authority to formally adopt the reporting model at that time.

Mayor Vince Williams asked whether payment calculations under the proposed model would be determined monthly or continue to rely on six-month averages.

Attorney Davenport responded that unless the Authority adopts a different methodology, allocations would continue to be calculated on a six-month basis. He explained that recalculating allocation percentages each month would likely be too cumbersome and unnecessary. He added that monthly reporting would allow the Authority to distinguish between trends and anomalies, noting that significant spikes or drops in usage would indicate operational problems rather than percentage allocation changes.

▪ **RFP**

Tom Owens

This discussion was removed from the agenda

▪ **Accountant Firms**

Councilmember Nathan Slaton

Chairwoman Fillingame referenced the discussion at the prior meeting in which the Board approved exploring the contribution methodology suggested by the City of Fairburn. She noted that Councilmember Slaton was expected to follow up with Attorney Davenport regarding that effort.

Councilmember Slaton stated that he contacted two to three individuals and had not yet received a response from one, and that discussions with the remaining contacts were still in progress.

Chairwoman Fillingame acknowledged the update and noted that the matter remains ongoing.

VII. Reports:

1. Financial Manager

Attorney Davenport presented Requisition #284 in the amount of \$8,264.71 for approval.

The motion to approve requisition #284 was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilmember Slaton.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

Attorney Davenport noted that earlier in his contributions analysis he referenced the Authority's annual financial target of approximately \$3,000,000. He explained that this figure corresponds to the Authority's annual debt service obligations, which include the principal and interest payment reflected under Requisition No. 285 in the amount of

\$2,447,487.50, as well as the June interest-only payment of approximately \$450,000. When combined, these payments total just under \$3,000,000 annually.

Attorney Davenport stated that while the Authority currently maintains adequate reserves to meet ongoing obligations, proper monthly reporting and allocation procedures will be necessary to ensure continued stability and to avoid future shortfalls. He emphasized that there is no immediate financial urgency but reiterated that improving processes now would preserve liquidity and maintain the Authority's ability to meet debt service obligations.

The motion to approve requisition #285 in the amount of \$2,447,487.50 was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilmember Jones.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried

2. Project Managers:

Project Manager Benz reported that Georgia Tech representatives were unable to attend the prior meeting as originally planned. She stated that he and Project Manager Gray met with the Georgia Tech team to gain an overview of the program and to prepare for potential engagement beginning in January, pending Authority interest.

Project Manager Gray provided an overview of Georgia Tech's "Center for Academic Success and Engagement" (CASE) program, noting that Mayor Smith facilitated the introduction through a university contact. The CASE program pairs groups of undergraduate students with governments, nonprofit organizations, and private entities to address complex challenges. The work is data-driven and exploratory in nature, with students focused on research and analytical deliverables rather than administrative tasks.

Each project team consists of approximately 10–12 students, and each student is required to commit approximately 5 hours per week over a 10-week semester. Students are not paid and do not receive academic credit; participation is treated as experiential learning designed to strengthen résumés and provide practical exposure.

Project Manager Benz stated that successful engagement depends significantly on the level of guidance and responsiveness provided by the sponsoring entity. CASE expects sponsors to commit to regular meetings (approximately one hour weekly), timely responses to questions, and direction on project objectives. Delays in sponsor communication can impede student progress.

Project Manager Gray added that CASE projects may be structured around one challenge or broken into multiple phases, depending on scope. The Georgia Tech representative indicated that the Authority's water supply project appears meaningful and high-impact, and that the program would be interested in supporting it if the Authority chooses to participate.

CASE representatives indicated that project scoping would need to occur during December and January, with a final scope adopted at the Authority's January meeting in order to commence the semester on February 1st.

Before recommending potential scopes, Project Manager Benz stated that the Authority should identify whether the project would be Authority-wide or city-specific. Authority-wide projects could be managed by the Project Managers, while city-specific projects would require designated contacts within each city to assist students in obtaining information related to utilities, population data, infrastructure assessments, or other relevant subjects.

Project Managers Gray and Benz noted that CASE prefers substantive analytic work rather than basic administrative tasks, and that student teams are highly motivated and competitive. Gray stated that the program currently has a waitlist of approximately 600 students for the upcoming semester.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked to whom the student teams would report.

Project Managers Benz and Gray responded that reporting structures would depend on whether the project is Authority-based or city-specific. Under an Authority project, the Project Managers could serve as primary coordinators. Under a city-specific structure, each city would designate a point of contact to facilitate access to information and ensure responsiveness to student inquiries.

Chairwoman Sonja Fillingame stated that Union City has previously participated in Georgia Tech's CASE program twice and found it beneficial. She expressed interest in hearing Board perspectives and noted that the program may be more suitable for city-specific projects rather than Authority-wide work due to the complexity and multi-jurisdictional nature of the Authority's long-term water initiative. She stated that 10-week project windows may not support Authority-wide needs but may effectively address city-level challenges, particularly those associated with tapping to the Authority system and other preparatory work.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith noted that the City of Palmetto recently completed four CASE projects and that the teams were highly capable. She stated that projects include both undergraduate team leads and graduate student oversight and that the final semester presentations are substantive, citing a recent City of Atlanta project that was publicly posted before the semester concluded. Mayor Thomas-Smith suggested that the Authority could define a broad overarching goal while individual cities identify sub-components relevant to their utility, infrastructure, and growth needs.

Project Manager Benz stated that CASE projects are competitive among students, who ultimately participate in an internal competition at the end of the semester. She noted that the program attracts highly motivated students and offers governments an affordable means of advancing complex tasks.

Project Managers Benz and Gray presented several preliminary challenge areas and possible scopes for Board consideration:

- Challenge Area 1: Affordability & Rate Impacts — including rate surveys, comparative analysis by region/utility, updated population projections, industrial growth projections, and rate modeling inputs. Project Manager Gray noted that population projections for the Authority are approximately five years old and that revised projections could influence long-term rate modeling and cost distribution.
- Challenge Area 2: Connectivity & System Readiness — including mapping and GIS support to determine how the three cities would physically connect to the Authority system, digitization of infrastructure (pipes, meters, interconnects), and preparatory data for eventual tapping.
- Challenge Area 3: Organizational & Administrative Support — including development of systems or processes to streamline information flow, usage reporting, or inter-agency communication structures.
- Challenge Area 4: Public Relations & Communication — including website modernization, public education materials, and messaging related to cost impacts and long-term benefits, particularly if rate adjustments become necessary.

Chairwoman Fillingame expressed particular support for a comparative rate survey, stating that such analysis would benefit all three cities.

Project Managers emphasized that the proposed scopes were preliminary and had not yet been vetted with Georgia Tech. They stated that next steps would involve refining the scope based on Board feedback and submitting proposed projects to Georgia Tech, noting that the program has a November/December engagement window with scoping finalized for January and student teams assigned for a February 1 project start.

Project Managers emphasized the need for timely direction from the Authority, citing staff travel and holiday schedules and the program's enrollment timeline. If the Authority wished to participate, scopes would need to be finalized and approved at the January meeting.

Mayor Vince Williams expressed support for participation in the program, stating that it provides valuable real-world experience for students and could reduce workload for both the Authority and its member cities. He recommended that any Authority-related project reporting be coordinated through the Project Managers, given their familiarity with files, scope, and organizational needs. He noted that individual cities could designate contacts if city-specific projects are pursued.

Project Managers Benz and Gray stated that they can revise and transmit proposed project ideas to Georgia Tech and would welcome city-specific project suggestions from Board members for inclusion in the scope discussion.

Councilmember Nathan Slaton stated that he supports the program and expressed interest in the potential for digitizing infrastructure, noting it would benefit the Authority and its member cities.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith requested that budgetary implications be considered, noting that sponsor involvement requires staff time and coordination. She asked that anticipated costs or workload impacts be identified in advance to avoid unexpected expenses.

Project Managers noted that their rates have not increased in over a decade but acknowledged that certain scopes could create additional administrative responsibilities, depending on the level of guidance required.

In response to a question regarding operational experience, Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that CASE projects for Palmetto involved iterative weekly updates, consistent communication, and proactive research by students. She noted that graduate students and program coordinators provide structure and oversight and that final semester presentations are comprehensive.

Chairwoman Fillingame stated that prior City-related CASE projects required substantial coordination with Public Works, but that the outcomes were useful and remain in use today. She reiterated interest in a rate survey and in infrastructure digitization to better support future system tapping and connectivity requirements.

Project Managers stated they would share Authority and city project concepts with Georgia Tech for refinement. They noted that CASE faculty would assist in determining scope size, phasing, and feasibility. They also noted that updated onboarding materials and a refreshed Authority outline would be provided at the January meeting for the benefit of newly appointed Board members.

VIII. Other Business

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith inquired whether the Authority maintains a formal budget, noting that cities are statutorily required to do so.

Attorney Davenport stated that Post and Associates historically prepared an annual budget based on projected Authority costs but that such budgeting has not occurred in recent years.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith asked whether information she previously forwarded regarding forensic audit services (David Sawyer) had been received.

Chairwoman Fillingame responded that at the prior meeting the Board voted to work through the Authority's accountant to define the scope of a forensic audit prior to engaging a vendor. She noted that Councilmember Slaton is working on that effort and that the Board's prior action remains in effect.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith asked whether discussion of the forensic audit must wait until January in order for the proposed plan to be presented. She noted that the matter has been deferred multiple times and stated that she recently engaged in discussion with a qualified forensic auditor with no affiliations to any member city. She stated that the individual has prior experience conducting forensic audits for water authorities, including Newton County, and appears capable of evaluating both scope and process. She asked whether the Authority must first develop a scope before engaging in further conversation with the prospective auditor.

Chairwoman Fillingame stated that the Board previously determined that the first step is to establish the appropriate scope for the forensic audit, and that such scope should be developed with assistance from the Authority's accountant to ensure accuracy and completeness. She stated that the Board agreed as a body at the last meeting that scope development should precede vendor discussions, and that engaging the accountant as the initial step would provide needed technical support.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith expressed concern that waiting until January would delay the process further, and stated that the goal is not to continue deferring action but to move toward implementation.

Chairwoman Fillingame responded that the Board reached this decision at the last meeting and that it took considerable time to reach consensus. She reiterated that proceeding with the agreed-upon process will ensure the forensic audit is properly framed, comprehensive, and aligned with Board objectives. She stated that once the accountant is engaged, scope development can proceed and vendor discussions may follow.

IX. Adjournment

The motion to adjourn the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water & Sewer Authority Meeting at 8:56 p.m. was made by Mayor Williams and seconded by Councilmember Slaton.

Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried