

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

April 14th, 2026 @ 7:00 PM
City of Palmetto- City Hall
595 Main Street, Palmetto, 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 Mayor Vince Williams	The Honorable City Manager Jamila Criss
The Honorable Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith	The Honorable Councilwoman Jessica Wilbanks
The Honorable Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones	

The following board members were absent during roll call:
The Honorable Vice-Chair Brian Jones (arrived at 7:05 p.m.)

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

III. Approval of Water Authority Minutes:

The motion to approve the March 2026 Water Authority meeting minutes was made by Mayor Vince Williams and Mayor Teresa Thomas Smith seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0; Motion Carried**

IV. New Business:

City Manager Jamila Criss stated that, at the previous meeting, the City of Fairburn was asked to provide a Scope of Work for Financial Management and Audit Support Services. She distributed the proposed scope document to the Board for review and potential discussion.

Chairman Phillips noted that, although the Board was just receiving the document that evening, it was prepared pursuant to the Board's prior discussion and vote directing Fairburn to develop a formal scope of services. He acknowledged that members would need time to review the document and opened the floor for any initial discussion regarding the proposed scope of work.

Mayor Vince Williams stated that he did not have any immediate discussion at that time, but wanted the opportunity to review the document further before engaging in additional discussion. He also expressed appreciation for the document being provided.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones requested that City Manager Criss provide a summary of the document for the record.

City Manager Jamila Criss explained that Attorney Davenport had previously shared via email that Post & Associates had outlined the duties they perform monthly for the Authority report. Those duties were incorporated into the proposed scope of work, particularly responsibilities related to bond payments, which must be completed twice monthly, as well as the annual insurance renewal process. She stated that the document was intended to provide a broader outline of potential services in response to concerns and questions raised by Board members during prior discussions.

City Manager Criss further noted that the proposed scope included sections related to audit services, specifically under Deliverables on page two, which included:

- Monthly financial reporting packages,
- Annual budget and forecast reports,
- Audit preparation plans,
- Corrective action plans, as needed.

She also referenced the timeline section concerning annual audit preparation, execution, and follow-up. Under Section E: Audit Support, the scope identified responsibilities including:

- Identifying a contractor to complete a full financial audit,
- Preparing schedules and documentation for annual audits,
- Acting as liaison with auditors and responding to findings,
- Assisting with corrective action plans.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones requested that the Board also review the minimum qualifications and evaluation criteria listed within the document for consideration.

Chairman Phillips stated that the document could be provided digitally in advance of the next meeting. He recommended that Board members review the document thoroughly and submit any input or suggested revisions prior to publication of the next agenda. He stated that the intent would be to bring the document back for final consideration at the next Board meeting after incorporating feedback and redlined revisions from members into an updated draft.

Mayor Vince Williams stated that, if the Board intended to make a decision at the next meeting, members should be informed of the timeline for submitting comments and revisions. He added that, based on his initial review of the minimum qualifications and evaluation criteria, everything appeared acceptable, though additional suggestions or revisions from members may still arise.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked, in his role related to procurement, whether there was a standard procurement template typically used into which the Scope of Work would be incorporated, or whether such a template already existed.

Chairman Phillips deferred the question to Attorney Davenport, asking whether the Board had previously utilized a formal procurement process or what precedent had been established in prior procurements.

Attorney Davenport explained that the Authority had utilized both formal and informal procurement processes in the past. He stated that, during the selection of the Engineer of Record, the Board underwent a very formal process, including engaging an engineer to assist in preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP). However, for the previous financial services scope of work completed several years ago, the Board used a more informal approach by collectively outlining desired services internally. He noted that no responses were ultimately received under that informal process. Attorney Davenport concluded that the Authority had experience utilizing both methods.

Councilmember Brian Jones then asked whether the Authority intended to proceed through a bid process or an RFP process, specifically questioning whether the focus would be on obtaining the lowest pricing or selecting the most qualified respondent.

Chairman Phillips stated that the Board had not yet made that determination and acknowledged that it was an important point for discussion and decision by the Board. He returned to Mayor Vince Williams' earlier comments

regarding establishing a timeline for review and stated that setting a deadline for comments and revisions was a valid consideration.

Chairman Phillips reminded the Board that the next meeting was scheduled for May 12th and reiterated Mayor Vince Williams' suggestion that members complete their review by an established date so that all recommendations could be consolidated into a revised draft for presentation at the next meeting.

Councilmember Brian Jones noted that, because agenda materials are generally prepared approximately one week in advance, Board members should complete their notes and revisions within the next two weeks so the updated document could be attached to the upcoming agenda if necessary.

Based on that suggestion, Chairman Phillips proposed that all Board members complete their review of the Scope of Work by Tuesday, April 28th. He stated that all recommended revisions would then be consolidated into a revised document and provided to Secretary Davis in time for inclusion on the agenda for the May 12th meeting.

The Board expressed agreement with the proposed timeline.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith requested clarification as to whether the selected contractor would also be responsible for creating the scope and identifying the individual or firm to perform the forensic audit.

Chairman Phillips responded affirmatively, stating that the provision was addressed on the second page of the proposed document.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she saw references to an audit but did not specifically see language referencing a forensic audit, noting that a forensic audit would require a more specialized scope.

Chairman Phillips suggested that any clarifying language or revisions be submitted during the review period leading up to April 28th so that the document could be updated accordingly.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that her primary concern was ensuring that the forensic audit component was clearly included within the scope of work.

City Manager Jamila Criss stated that, if acceptable to the Board, she could work with Jessica to distribute the document electronically in Microsoft Word format with Track Changes enabled so that edits and revisions could be clearly reviewed by all members.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that, pursuant to the agreed timeline, it was also appropriate to begin discussing the next phase of the procurement process once the Scope of Work was finalized. Referencing Councilmember Brian Jones' earlier comments, Chairman Phillips stated that the Board should determine how it would solicit and procure the services.

Chairman Phillips further suggested that, given the technical nature of the specifications and scoring methodologies involved, each city designate one staff member familiar with procurement processes to collaborate collectively on developing a common procurement template and scoring methodology. He stated that the recommendations from staff could then be brought back before the Board at the next meeting so that all three cities would have representation and input in the process.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked whether it would create a conflict for him to provide input in his professional capacity or whether he should defer entirely to staff.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that the Board would welcome Councilmember Jones' expertise and input in the process.

Councilmember Brian Jones stated that he wanted to ensure there would not be a conflict if he participated in the discussion and recommendation process while also being responsible for voting on the matter.

Attorney Dennis Davenport advised that it would likely be best for the detailed evaluation process to remain at the staff level, given that Board members would ultimately be required to render an objective decision regarding the firms and proposals presented.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith asked where the firms would be sourced from and requested clarification regarding whether the Authority would proceed through a bid process or an RFP process. She also inquired about the anticipated timeline for responses and the overall procurement schedule so that the Board could be adequately prepared.

Chairman Tony Phillips explained that the designated staff representatives from each city would collaborate to discuss those matters and bring back formal recommendations to the Board. He stated that staff would outline the proposed solicitation process, including:

- How the services would be solicited,
- The length of time the solicitation would remain open,
- Where the solicitation would be publicly posted,
- The evaluation methodology,
- The selection process for bids or proposals.

Chairman Phillips stated that staff would present those recommendations to the Board at the next meeting for consideration.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith then asked what overall timeline the Board anticipated for completion of the procurement process, including how long the bid or proposal solicitation would remain open. She questioned whether the Board was considering a 60-day process or another timeframe.

Councilmember Brian Jones responded that, under a traditional bid process, the timeline would likely include approximately 30 days for solicitation followed by staff review and recommendation before returning to the Board. He further stated that, if the Board elected to proceed with a formal RFP process, the timeline could extend to approximately four months. He estimated that a bid process would likely take approximately three months at minimum before recommendations could be presented back to the Board.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that he would ask the designated staff representatives from each city to fully evaluate both options and present detailed recommendations outlining what both a bid process and an RFP process would entail, including projected timelines. He reiterated that the Board would ultimately discuss and vote on which procurement method best suited the Authority's needs. Chairman Phillips acknowledged that each process carried different procedural requirements and timelines, with an RFP process generally taking longer than a standard bid process.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith raised concerns regarding the absence of an established budget and questioned how the Board would determine compensation ranges for the services being solicited. She asked how the Authority could effectively move forward with procurement without first establishing a budget for the work to be performed.

Mayor Vince Williams responded that, despite the current lack of a finalized budget, the Authority understood the necessity of securing a qualified individual or organization to perform the needed financial and audit-related

services. He stated that the selected consultant or firm would ultimately assist the Authority in developing a formal budget moving forward.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith further questioned whether the solicitation process, whether by bid or RFP, would require the inclusion of a proposed compensation range or budget amount.

Councilmember Brian Jones stated that the Authority at least had a baseline figure based on prior financial services expenditures, estimating approximately \$6,600 annually.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she did not recall seeing clear payment amounts reflected in prior requisitions related to Post & Associates and questioned how the Board could accurately establish a baseline for future procurement without a clearer understanding of prior costs and services rendered.

Councilmember Brian Jones clarified that Post & Associates was currently being paid approximately \$550 per month.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith then received confirmation that Quality Data was associated with Post & Associates.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that, while the Authority could consider the current arrangement with Post & Associates as a reference point, the Board should recognize that future costs for expanded financial management and audit support services may differ significantly from the current expenditures. He acknowledged Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith's concerns regarding the absence of a budget and agreed that the issue was valid. However, Chairman Phillips stated that the Authority could not remain stagnant while attempting to resolve all budget-related concerns simultaneously.

Chairman Phillips further stated that the Authority was effectively "building the plane while flying it," emphasizing the immediate need for qualified financial expertise to assist with establishing budgets, audits, and related financial management processes. He acknowledged the challenge of determining whether a budget should precede procurement or whether financial professionals should first be retained to assist the Authority in developing those financial structures moving forward.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith reiterated her concern regarding the absence of an established budget and questioned how the Authority would determine compensation for the individual, firm, or service provider ultimately selected. She asked where the proposed payment range or amount would originate.

Mayor Vince Williams suggested that, since representatives from each city would be tasked with assisting in the process, those individuals could collectively provide recommendations regarding a reasonable compensation range for the scope of work being contemplated. He stated that the participating cities likely had access to staff and professionals familiar with similar services who could help establish reasonable pricing expectations.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith agreed that establishing at least a baseline compensation range would be necessary. She noted that, without a general range or benchmark, the Authority could receive proposals with significantly varying costs and would lack a frame of reference for evaluation.

Councilmember Brian Jones suggested an initial conceptual figure of approximately \$1,000 per month, equating to roughly \$12,000 annually, as a starting point for discussion. He noted that the scope of services being contemplated would likely exceed the current level of service previously provided and therefore would reasonably require compensation greater than the current \$500 monthly arrangement. Councilmember Jones further stated that city staff members familiar with similar procurement efforts could review existing contracts and provide guidance regarding whether the proposed estimate was reasonable or below market standards. He suggested that a potential

working range between approximately \$12,000 and \$20,000 annually could serve as an initial framework for staff review and discussion.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that, under the current draft of the proposed procurement document, cost proposals would form part of the evaluation criteria. He explained that, as part of the bid process, the Board would evaluate pricing alongside qualifications and other factors when determining the successful bidder or proposer.

Mayor Vince Williams requested that Chairman Phillips provide the Board's direction regarding staff participation and coordination in writing so that each city could formally identify and assign its representative for the process.

Chairman Tony Phillips agreed to provide the requested written communication and further requested that each city identify its designated staff representative by Friday. He stated that the participating cities likely already knew which individuals would be most appropriate for the assignment and asked that those names be submitted to him directly.

Councilmember Brian Jones then asked each city how they typically advertise procurement opportunities and solicitations.

Representatives from the cities briefly discussed the advertising methods and procurement posting practices currently utilized within their respective municipalities.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that he believed the designated staff representatives from each city would collectively determine the most appropriate advertising and solicitation methods once they convened together.

Mayor Vince Williams concluded the discussion by thanking City Manager Jamila Criss for preparing the proposed Scope of Work document for the Board's consideration.

Regional Water Planning & Proposed Water Summit Discussion

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones opened discussion regarding the Authority's continued exploration of regional water utilization and long-term water planning efforts. She asked how the Board might proceed with next steps in advancing those discussions.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that, at the previous meeting, he had suggested that the Authority take a proactive leadership role in initiating a broader regional dialogue regarding water planning and infrastructure. He recalled that the Board generally expressed consensus around the idea that the Authority should serve as a convener for long-term regional water discussions and collaborative planning efforts.

Chairman Phillips explained that his prior recommendation included hosting a Regional Water Summit, or similarly titled event, within the next three to six months. He stated that the purpose of the summit would be to engage neighboring cities, counties, and regional stakeholders in a collaborative discussion surrounding:

- Long-term water supply solutions,
- Fifty-year regional water planning,
- Infrastructure collaboration opportunities,
- Regional funding strategies.

Chairman Phillips further stated that such an effort would position the Authority as a proactive regional leader in facilitating discussions surrounding future water sustainability and infrastructure planning.

Chairman Phillips referenced a recent presentation made by Danny Johnson to the Authority and noted that Mr. Johnson had subsequently been invited to present similar information during the South Fulton Municipal

Association meeting held the previous month. He noted that, although Union City representatives were attending a retreat at that time, several neighboring cities participated in the discussion. Chairman Phillips stated that Mr. Johnson's presentation generated significant discussion and appeared to create meaningful interest among participating municipalities regarding future regional collaboration and continued dialogue on water-related issues.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she believed the presentation helped stakeholders better understand the true scope of the regional water challenges facing the area. She commented that, while many individuals understood that water-related issues existed, they may not have fully understood the magnitude or regional implications of the problem until hearing the broader presentation. Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that the discussion reinforced the importance of collaboration among municipalities and regional stakeholders, adding that a Regional Water Summit could provide an appropriate setting for a more in-depth and solution-oriented dialogue involving additional participants and experts.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones agreed and stated that she was pleasantly surprised and encouraged by both the level of interest and the thoughtful questions raised during the South Fulton Municipal Association meeting. She remarked that many individuals previously viewed water infrastructure concerns as distant or non-immediate issues, but Danny Johnson's presentation helped frame the issue in a way that emphasized the urgency and long-term consequences facing the region. Mayor Portis-Jones further noted that the level of engagement demonstrated genuine interest in pursuing continued discussions and collaborative solutions, adding that the meeting extended significantly beyond its scheduled timeframe due to the depth of conversation and participation.

Chairman Tony Phillips noted that many stakeholders attending the meeting were unfamiliar with the history and role of the Authority, despite having heard references to it previously. He stated that the discussion provided an opportunity to increase awareness regarding the Authority's mission and regional significance.

Chairman Phillips then stated that, as discussions continued internally regarding how best to move the initiative forward, he and City Manager Jamila Criss had informally discussed several potential ideas related to organizing and structuring the effort. He invited City Manager Criss to share one such idea for the Board's consideration.

Before City Manager Criss began her remarks, Mayor Vince Williams shared that he had previously organized a similar water summit several years earlier at the Georgia Municipal Association headquarters. Mayor Williams stated that the summit included participation from representatives of metropolitan cities, counties, organizations, and regional stakeholders. He noted that the event was well attended and supported in part by Bloomberg Philanthropies, resulting in productive discussions and networking opportunities, although no substantial long-term action ultimately followed the event.

Mayor Vince Williams stated that, despite the previous effort not resulting in immediate implementation, he believed the timing was now appropriate and that the current regional climate presented a renewed opportunity to move discussions forward in a more impactful way. He further stated that he was not surprised that many individuals remained unfamiliar with the Authority, as he had observed similar reactions during the earlier summit. However, he noted that participants had expressed appreciation that the conversations were being initiated and stated that it was encouraging to see a diverse group of stakeholders and decision-makers participating in the discussions.

City Manager Jamila Criss stated that, through ongoing discussions within the South Fulton Municipal Association, it had become increasingly clear that the issue of regional water planning impacts all cities within South Fulton County due to the area's continued residential and commercial growth, including the expansion of potential data center developments. She noted that many of those concerns surfaced during the recent discussions and presentations.

City Manager Criss explained that, in conversations with Chairman Tony Phillips, the primary question became how to maximize attendance and engagement among elected officials and regional stakeholders so that discussions would involve a broader coalition rather than only a limited group of participants. She suggested that the upcoming Georgia Municipal Association conference in June could provide an ideal opportunity to initiate broader regional engagement, as representatives from municipalities across the state would already be gathered in one location.

City Manager Criss proposed that the Authority consider hosting a reception or informal gathering during the conference to introduce neighboring cities and regional partners to the Authority's mission and regional water planning objectives. She suggested inviting municipalities within South Fulton County as well as neighboring jurisdictions such as Tyrone and Peachtree City to begin expanding the conversation. She further stated that such a gathering could serve as an introductory opportunity to explain who the Authority is, why regional water planning is important, and how future collaboration could benefit the region. City Manager Criss also noted that the reception could potentially serve as a precursor or continuation of the broader water summit discussions previously initiated several years earlier.

Mayor Vince Williams responded that, if the Authority intended to host an event during the GMA conference, planning efforts would need to begin immediately because conference programming and venue scheduling were likely already underway. He emphasized the importance of securing space and coordinating logistics promptly.

Chairman Tony Phillips agreed and stated that, if the Board was generally supportive of moving forward, the proposed event would likely function more as a reception or networking gathering rather than a formal conference session. He noted that receptions are commonly hosted during GMA conferences after official programming hours and are frequently used as opportunities for networking and informal dialogue. Chairman Phillips described the proposed gathering as a "jump-start conversation" and "save-the-date" opportunity to begin building momentum around regional water collaboration discussions.

Mayor Vince Williams stated that he supported moving forward with the concept and recommended beginning planning efforts immediately, including determining the event format, location, and scheduling details so that save-the-date notifications could be distributed early to interested stakeholders and participants. He noted that attendees at GMA are often invited to numerous events simultaneously, making early coordination important.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith suggested that the Authority consider partnering with organizations such as the Council for Quality Growth or other regional entities to help broaden participation and provide additional perspectives that could add value to the discussions.

Mayor Vince Williams responded that he agreed with the concept of strategic partnerships but suggested that the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) may be a more appropriate partner due to its direct involvement in regional water planning initiatives. He noted that the Council for Quality Growth already hosts a significant presence and programming during the GMA conference each year, whereas ARC typically has less visibility during the event and may therefore be better positioned to collaborate on a regional water initiative.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith clarified that she was also considering broader partnerships outside of the GMA conference itself as the regional discussions continued to evolve. She stated that involving as many relevant partners and stakeholders as possible would strengthen the Authority's efforts and provide additional value to future conversations and planning initiatives.

Chairman Tony Phillips agreed and stated that he supported the suggestion to expand collaborative partnerships as discussions progressed. He then asked Attorney Dennis Davenport whether it would be legally permissible for the Authority to host such a reception during the conference.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded that hosting a reception itself would not necessarily present an issue; however, the determining factor would be the structure and nature of the event. He cautioned that the Authority would need to be mindful of whether the gathering could legally be interpreted as an official meeting of the Authority.

Mayor Vince Williams suggested that the Authority avoid formally branding the event as an official meeting of the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Authority. Instead, he suggested describing it more generally as a regional water discussion or networking opportunity to invite stakeholders into broader conversation.

Chairman Tony Phillips referenced the large number of elected officials who typically attend the annual GMA conference and asked Attorney Davenport how quorum-related concerns could be appropriately navigated within that environment.

Attorney Dennis Davenport clarified that his concern was not the GMA conference itself, but rather how the Authority structured and presented its proposed event. He explained that, if the Authority publicly organized an event around specific discussion topics directly related to official Authority business and a quorum of Board members were present, the gathering could arguably constitute an official meeting under applicable open meetings laws.

Attorney Davenport further explained that a more informal networking reception, where Board members and attendees engaged in general discussions and relationship-building without conducting official Authority business, would likely not create legal concerns. However, he cautioned that once discussions became formally organized around Authority business matters, with structured topics or coordinated deliberations involving a quorum, the event could legally be considered a meeting regardless of its physical location or conference setting.

Attorney Davenport noted that numerous governmental entities had previously encountered legal issues by failing to recognize when informal gatherings effectively evolved into meetings subject to open meetings requirements. He advised the Board to carefully consider whether a quorum would be present and whether the event structure could reasonably be interpreted as organized deliberation on Authority business matters.

The board members asked whether the Authority could invite a speaker to participate in the proposed reception or discussion event.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded that inviting a formal speaker could make the gathering appear more organized and structured, thereby increasing the likelihood that the event would legally be considered an official meeting. Attorney Davenport stated that, if the Water Authority invited a speaker to present before a quorum of the Board on matters related to Authority business, the event could reasonably be interpreted as a called meeting subject to open meetings requirements.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones then asked whether the Authority could simply designate the gathering as an official meeting.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded affirmatively, explaining that the Authority could legally hold a called meeting in Savannah provided that all required public meeting procedures were followed. He stated that the Authority would need to:

- Properly post notice of the meeting location, date, and time,
- Prepare and distribute an agenda,
- Conduct the meeting in accordance with applicable open meetings requirements,

- Take official minutes during the meeting,
- Approve those minutes at a subsequent meeting of the Authority.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that, given the legal considerations, the Authority could potentially move forward by formally treating the gathering as a meeting rather than attempting to characterize it solely as a reception. He noted that the Board could then host a reception component while also addressing any official discussion items in compliance with meeting requirements.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith asked for clarification regarding the intended audience and target participants for the proposed gathering. She questioned whether the Authority intended to invite stakeholders solely from within the immediate region or whether participation would extend to neighboring jurisdictions and broader regional entities. Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that identifying the target audience was important in determining the structure and overall purpose of the event.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that the Board had not yet finalized a specific invitation list or participant structure, as the discussion was still in the conceptual stage. He reiterated that the primary purpose of a Savannah gathering would not be to engage in detailed technical discussions regarding water planning, infrastructure, or long-term regional solutions. Instead, the goal would simply be to introduce the concept, generate awareness, and begin building interest around a future regional water discussion initiative.

Chairman Phillips further stated that the gathering would essentially function as an introductory “save-the-date” opportunity to inform stakeholders that a broader regional water discussion would be forthcoming after the conference. He emphasized that the Authority would not attempt to solve regional water issues during the Savannah event itself, but rather use the opportunity to place the issue on stakeholders’ radar and encourage future participation.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith again raised concerns regarding funding and questioned how the Authority would pay for hosting such an event in the absence of an established budget. She specifically asked whether the Authority would incur costs for meeting space, food, or related event expenses.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded by explaining that the Authority already incurs operational expenses on a monthly basis and that any approved event-related costs would simply constitute another Board-authorized expenditure. He stated that he did not anticipate the proposed gathering becoming a high-cost event and emphasized that the Board’s intention would be to keep the event reasonable and modest in scope. Chairman Phillips further noted that, until a formal budget process is established, the Authority would continue operating through the same expenditure approval practices currently in place.

Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks stated that she believed the concept was worthwhile; however, given the proximity of the GMA conference in June, securing an appropriate reception venue and caterer on short notice could prove difficult. She suggested that, instead of attempting to organize a formal reception during the conference, the Authority consider creating a professionally designed and highly visible “Save the Date” communication piece that could be distributed during the conference. Councilmember Wilbanks further suggested that the Authority then focus on organizing a larger formal regional meeting or summit after returning from GMA, potentially targeting August for the event.

Chairman Tony Phillips agreed that Councilmember Wilbanks raised a valid concern regarding timing and venue availability. He acknowledged that many conference venues and restaurants were likely already heavily booked for the conference period and stated that, if the Authority was unable to secure an appropriate location, the proposed “Save the Date” strategy would serve as a strong alternative option.

Chairman Phillips further stated that the original intent of a reception would have been to gather regional stakeholders in one centralized setting due to the large size of the GMA conference. However, he acknowledged that simply distributing informational materials throughout the conference could make it more difficult to specifically target stakeholders from the Authority's immediate region.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith agreed and stated that, given the numerous meetings, classes, receptions, and scheduling conflicts already associated with the GMA conference, identifying an ideal timeframe that would allow sufficient regional participation could be challenging. She emphasized the importance of finding a scheduling "sweet spot" that would maximize attendance and make the event meaningful and worthwhile for participants.

Chairman Tony Phillips stated that he agreed with the comments expressed by Board members regarding the logistical challenges associated with organizing an event during the upcoming Georgia Municipal Association conference. He acknowledged that securing an appropriate venue and coordinating schedules within a limited timeframe would likely be difficult. However, Chairman Phillips stated that the Board could at least make an effort to explore available opportunities, noting that the overall objective was not necessarily to reach every potential stakeholder immediately, but rather to begin generating awareness and initiating regional dialogue surrounding long-term water planning and infrastructure collaboration.

Chairman Phillips emphasized that, even if only a portion of targeted stakeholders participated initially, those individuals could help expand awareness and continue conversations within their respective networks and jurisdictions. He reiterated that the broader goal remained convening a larger regional water summit at a later date and that outreach efforts would continue regardless of the level of engagement achieved during the GMA conference.

Chairman Phillips further stated that, between the current meeting and the next scheduled meeting, efforts would be made to identify a suitable venue, meeting space, or time slot that could accommodate an informal gathering or discussion during the conference. He acknowledged that the timeline was tight and that the Board might ultimately determine that no appropriate option was available. However, he stated that staff and Board leadership would attempt to identify feasible opportunities and report back to the Board at the next meeting for further consideration.

Chairman Phillips noted that, if an acceptable option were identified, the Board would need to make a final decision at the next meeting so that any subsequent communications and invitations could be distributed in a timely manner. He reiterated that the proposed gathering would remain relatively informal in nature; however, based on the guidance provided by Attorney Dennis Davenport, any such event involving a quorum of the Board and discussion of Authority matters would likely be formally noticed and structured as an official meeting to avoid any potential issues related to open meetings requirements.

Chairman Phillips also emphasized that continued progress toward organizing a larger regional summit would require additional discussion and active participation from Board members. He specifically acknowledged Mayor Vince Williams' prior experience organizing similar regional water discussions and noted that several Board members possessed valuable relationships and expertise that could help convene broader regional dialogue moving forward. Chairman Phillips stated that, if feasible, the Savannah gathering would simply serve as an initial spark or introductory effort leading toward the larger regional summit planned for a later date.

Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks then asked whether the Board had identified a target number or category of regional partners it hoped to engage in the discussions.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that he would welcome participation from any regional stakeholder interested in contributing to the dialogue. He stated that the Authority should remain open to participation from neighboring

jurisdictions and regional entities, including communities such as Tyrone and Coweta County, if they expressed interest in participating. Chairman Phillips stated that, as the Authority explored long-term regional solutions, broader participation would ultimately help distribute responsibilities, strengthen collaboration, and potentially reduce future infrastructure costs.

Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks stated that, based on her limited experience with the Board, the Authority appeared to move at a slower pace than she initially anticipated. She suggested that, rather than attempting to organize an event during the already crowded GMA conference schedule, the Board might achieve better results by focusing its efforts and available resources on organizing a well-planned and impactful regional summit locally at a later date, potentially in August. Councilmember Wilbanks suggested that the Board instead consider developing a high-quality and dynamic informational or “Save the Date” communication piece to distribute during the GMA conference while dedicating more substantial planning efforts toward the larger regional summit after the conference.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that he did not necessarily view the two concepts as mutually exclusive. He stated that, if a reasonable opportunity for a Savannah gathering could be identified, the Authority should consider utilizing it; however, if no practical option emerged, the Board could simply continue focusing its efforts toward the larger regional summit initiative. Chairman Phillips reiterated that the regional summit remained necessary regardless of whether a Savannah gathering ultimately occurred and emphasized that the conference opportunity simply represented a potentially valuable opportunity to begin building momentum and awareness.

Mayor Vince Williams added that many potential regional partners, infrastructure advocates, and organizations involved in water-related initiatives would already be present at the GMA conference, including entities participating in exhibit halls and infrastructure-related discussions. He stated that the conference environment could provide a valuable opportunity to generate additional interest and engagement from stakeholders who may wish to become involved once they learned about the Authority’s efforts.

Chairman Tony Phillips concluded the discussion by noting that, during a recent meeting involving city managers from across Fulton County concerning service delivery strategies, water infrastructure and long-term water planning emerged as one of the primary issues discussed. He stated that the increasing prominence of water-related concerns throughout the region further reinforced the importance and timeliness of the Authority’s efforts to convene regional dialogue and collaboration. Chairman Phillips remarked that, if the Authority could successfully initiate and sustain the discussion, it might be surprised by the level of regional interest and participation that would emerge.

Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks suggested that, rather than attempting to organize a formal reception during the Georgia Municipal Association conference, the Authority could potentially participate in a manner similar to a vendor or exhibitor presence by utilizing informational materials or a table display to introduce the Authority and encourage regional partnerships and dialogue.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones responded that receptions and networking gatherings often attract stronger attendance because they provide incentives for participation, including food, hospitality, and informal networking opportunities. She noted that the GMA conference environment naturally encourages attendees to participate in receptions and social gatherings, making it an ideal opportunity to introduce the Authority’s regional water initiative and begin cultivating interest.

Mayor Portis-Jones further stated that, during Danny Johnson’s earlier presentation, he outlined a much broader regional framework for future water planning discussions that extended beyond South Fulton County alone. She emphasized the importance of intentionally reaching out to those regional stakeholders and jurisdictions identified during the presentation, including making direct phone calls and personal invitations when appropriate. Mayor

Portis-Jones stated that many stakeholders may be more inclined to attend an introductory gathering in Savannah because the concept is still in its early stages and has not yet evolved into a larger formal summit.

Chairman Tony Phillips agreed and noted that Danny Johnson's presentation extended well beyond South Fulton County and addressed broader regional concerns involving the Flint River Basin and neighboring jurisdictions' water supply challenges. Chairman Phillips stated that the issues being discussed were truly regional in nature and affected numerous communities in varying ways. He acknowledged that not all stakeholders would likely participate in the initial stages of discussion; however, he emphasized that the goal was simply to begin establishing dialogue and allow the effort to grow organically over time.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith suggested that the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) could potentially serve as a collaborative partner in organizing a future water summit. She referenced ARC's existing role in regional planning initiatives and noted that ARC was already hosting a housing-related summit later in the month. Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that ARC's involvement could significantly expand participation and help bring additional stakeholders and regional decision-makers into the conversation. She further remarked that, while the Authority itself may initially attract smaller participation, ARC possessed the regional relationships and organizational reach to convene a much broader audience.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that he supported partnering with any organization capable of adding value to the regional dialogue and acknowledged ARC's importance as a regional stakeholder. However, Chairman Phillips explained that, during previous conversations with ARC regarding water regionalization, ARC indicated that it preferred not to serve as the initial organizer or initiator of such discussions. Rather, ARC expressed willingness to participate once local entities demonstrated sufficient regional interest and consensus around the need for a broader water planning conversation.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she believed the Authority had already demonstrated meaningful interest and momentum based on recent discussions and stakeholder engagement. She suggested that the Board could now approach ARC from a collaborative standpoint by demonstrating existing support and requesting partnership assistance in helping facilitate a regional summit. Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that ARC already possessed much of the infrastructure, experience, and organizational framework necessary to support such an effort and that the Authority could potentially "plug into" existing regional planning resources and networks.

Chairman Tony Phillips responded that ARC should absolutely be considered a highly valuable stakeholder and collaborative partner in future regional planning efforts. However, he expressed uncertainty regarding whether the Authority should attempt to fully transfer organizational responsibility for the summit to ARC or instead continue independently initiating discussions while simultaneously inviting ARC to participate as a partner and facilitator. Chairman Phillips reiterated that ARC previously indicated it would likely be willing to assist once sufficient regional interest and consensus were demonstrated.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she would personally welcome an opportunity to meet with ARC representatives to discuss the concept further and better understand how potential collaboration might work. She noted that she would already be participating in ARC's upcoming housing summit as a panelist and suggested that the timing could present an opportunity to begin those conversations.

Chairman Tony Phillips emphasized that the Board itself needed to remain actively engaged and visibly involved in leading the process. He stated that, while ARC's participation and support would add substantial value, the Authority itself needed to demonstrate leadership and initiative given the Authority's long-standing regional history and ongoing discussions regarding the need for measurable progress. Chairman Phillips stated that there was a distinction between partnering collaboratively with ARC and asking ARC to independently assume responsibility for organizing the effort.

Mayor Vince Williams agreed and stated that the Authority itself should remain the lead entity driving the regional water discussions and summit efforts forward.

Chairman Tony Phillips concurred, reiterating that the Authority should remain the primary leader in the initiative while simultaneously bringing in valuable partners such as ARC and other stakeholders to strengthen the process and expand regional collaboration opportunities.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones concluded the discussion by clarifying that the larger regional summit and the proposed Savannah gathering should be viewed as two separate initiatives. She explained that the Savannah effort was intended to serve merely as an introduction to the concept and a continuation of the awareness-building efforts previously initiated through the South Fulton Municipal Association presentation. Mayor Portis-Jones stated that the purpose of the Savannah outreach would simply be to expose additional regional stakeholders to the concept, generate broader interest, and encourage future participation in the larger regional summit once it is formally organized.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith stated that she hoped the Board did not perceive her questions and concerns as opposition to the concept itself or as a lack of understanding regarding the discussions taking place. She clarified that she fully understood the broader objective and simply wanted to ensure that the Authority was maximizing its time, resources, and opportunities effectively. Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith referenced earlier comments made by Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks and stated that she wanted to ensure the Board was making the best strategic use of the available opportunities and focusing efforts in a way that would generate meaningful participation and engagement.

Mayor Vince Williams responded that he believed there was a workable path forward regarding a potential Savannah event, although it would require a coordinated and intentional effort to organize within the limited timeframe. He noted that Board members and staff had relationships with individuals involved in planning activities surrounding the Georgia Municipal Association conference and suggested that those contacts could be utilized to identify potential meeting spaces or opportunities to host a brief gathering. Mayor Williams stated that interested stakeholders could then be invited to attend the discussion and that, if the gathering ultimately constituted an official meeting, appropriate notice and meeting procedures could simply be followed. He emphasized that the concept was not intended to become an extended or highly formal event, but rather a brief introductory discussion lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

Chairman Tony Phillips reiterated that he did not want the discussion regarding Savannah to distract from or complicate the Authority's larger objective, which remained organizing and convening a broader Regional Water Summit within the next three to six months. Chairman Phillips stated that, if the Savannah opportunity ultimately proved beneficial and feasible, the Authority could move forward with it; however, if logistical challenges prevented it from materializing appropriately, the Board should simply continue focusing on the larger regional summit initiative without concern.

Chairman Phillips further emphasized his belief that the Authority itself needed to proactively lead the regional dialogue regarding long-term water supply planning and collaboration. He stated that the Board should continue working to bring together interested stakeholders and regional partners in order to begin meaningful discussions surrounding regional water solutions and infrastructure planning.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones then made a motion that the Authority move forward with exploring and pursuing an event opportunity in Savannah during the GMA conference period, with the final structure and format of the event to be determined based upon further research, logistical feasibility, and planning efforts. Mayor Portis-Jones further stated that staff and Board leadership would return to the Board with the necessary details and recommendations for final consideration and approval at a future meeting. Councilmember Brian Jones seconded the motion.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith and Councilmember Jessica Wilbanks voted in opposition to the motion.

V. Reports:

1. Water Attorney Report-

Attorney Dennis Davenport reported that, during the Authority's recent meetings, discussions had primarily focused on two major areas:

1. Member city contribution payments, and
2. The process of consolidating and evaluating liabilities and consumption data across the Authority.

Attorney Davenport stated that, although he inadvertently left the updated contribution summary sheet at his office, he was pleased to report that all participating cities were either current or ahead of schedule regarding their contribution payments. He commended the cities for their responsiveness, diligence, and active participation in maintaining compliance with the Authority's financial obligations.

Attorney Davenport further stated that the level of cooperation demonstrated by the member cities reflected the type of collaborative structure and accountability the Board hoped to achieve through the Authority's current operational framework. He expressed appreciation to all participating municipalities for their continued efforts and engagement.

Attorney Davenport then transitioned discussion to the issue of water consumption reporting and stated that the Authority had previously discussed utilizing supplier invoices as the primary method for verifying and documenting water consumption data. He explained that those invoices would generally originate from entities such as the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management, Coweta County Water & Sewerage Authority, or applicable municipal water treatment facilities.

Attorney Davenport stated that he had been working closely with Ms. Reddick of Palmetto and that the Authority had successfully assembled approximately five months of consumption data for Palmetto. He noted that he had sent Ms. Reddick an email earlier that day regarding several remaining gaps in the documentation and stated that he was confident those remaining items were being addressed.

Attorney Davenport further stated that he had also received useful information and invoice documentation from the Fairburn related to water purchases from Atlanta. He noted that the upcoming billing cycle would complete the six-month reporting window necessary for recalculating and updating the Authority's consumption formula.

Attorney Davenport urged all participating cities not only to provide current billing information, but also to continue working backward to ensure that all consumption records from the prior five months were fully accounted for. He stated that he believed the Authority was close to completing the required documentation for Palmetto and was continuing efforts to finalize information from Union City as well.

Attorney Davenport emphasized the importance of ensuring that all consumption records were fully current before the next billing period so that the updated contribution and allocation formula could be accurately calculated for the next six-month invoice cycle.

City Manager Jamila Criss asked Attorney Davenport to confirm whether he had received all necessary invoices from the Fairburn for the current billing cycle.

Attorney Dennis Davenport confirmed that he had received all invoices from the City of Fairburn associated with the current billing period.

City Manager Jamila Criss further explained that, prior to adoption of the Board's recent resolution, Fairburn's utility invoices had historically been transmitted directly from the city's Utilities Water Manager to Post & Associates. She noted that Post & Associates likely already possessed a significant portion of the requested historical information and stated that she would be willing to resend or forward those prior communications if necessary.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded that, if the invoices had already been provided to Mr. Castle of Post & Associates, he would follow up directly with him regarding the records. Attorney Davenport stated that he had intentionally avoided contacting Mr. Castle over the prior several days due to timing considerations but indicated that he would reconnect with him regarding the consumption data and invoice documentation.

Attorney Davenport further stated that he did not want to assume that any requested information had not already been reviewed or received and explained that he would conduct a follow-up review with Post & Associates to identify whether any remaining documentation gaps existed. He stated that, if additional information was needed, he would contact the appropriate cities directly to request clarification or supplemental records.

Attorney Davenport reiterated that his goal was to have the updated six-month consumption and contribution worksheet fully prepared by the conclusion of the current billing cycle. He noted that the Authority's recent discussions had significantly increased awareness among member cities regarding both water usage and financial contribution responsibilities, which he described as a foundational component of the Authority's overall mission and operational structure.

Attorney Davenport commended the Board and participating municipalities for the progress achieved thus far and stated that he would continue communicating with the designated working group to ensure all participating cities received consistent and transparent information moving forward.

Attorney Davenport concluded by noting that the absence of the updated contribution sheet during the meeting was unusual and apologized for not having the document available for distribution.

2. Financial Manager

Attorney Dennis Davenport presented Requisition #290 in the amount of \$16,479.89 for the Board's consideration.

A motion to approve Requisition #290 was made by Mayor Vince Williams and seconded by City Manager Jamila Criss.

Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith then inquired about the delayed invoice from BNY Mellon that had been discussed during the previous meeting and asked whether any additional follow-up information had been obtained.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded that he intended to follow up further with Anthony Watkins regarding the matter. He stated that Ms. Watkins' recollection was that the invoice may have been connected to a prior bond issue involving Palmetto from several years earlier. Attorney Davenport explained that Ms. Watkins was currently attempting to locate supporting documentation to confirm the origin and nature of the invoice.

Attorney Davenport noted that he had experienced difficulty reaching Ms. Watkins earlier that day but stated that he would continue following up to obtain clarification regarding both the invoice and the related post office box

issue previously discussed by the Board. He further confirmed that the referenced P.O. Box was the official post office box associated with the Authority.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith then asked whether the outstanding invoice could potentially represent debt belonging solely to the Palmetto or whether it could instead remain an obligation of the Authority that had simply been mailed to Palmetto.

Attorney Dennis Davenport responded that either scenario remained possible at that time. He explained that the invoice could potentially relate to a historical bond issue associated with financing the water treatment plant later acquired by the Authority, including related fees and obligations connected to that transaction. Alternatively, he acknowledged that it could potentially represent a separate or independent bond obligation.

Attorney Davenport stated that Ms. Watkins was continuing to work with Dan Post to trace the documentation and determine the exact origin and responsibility associated with the invoice. He apologized for not having additional information available during the meeting and stated that he expected to provide a more complete update at the next Board meeting.

3. Project Managers:

Project Managers reported that the Water Authority's SAMS registration had been successfully renewed, thereby maintaining the Authority's eligibility to pursue future federal grants and loan opportunities during the upcoming year.

Project Managers further advised the Board that updates related to the water plant planning process would soon be distributed to each participating city. They stated that representatives would be reaching out directly to the individual municipalities requesting updated information regarding infrastructure needs, supporting documentation, and related planning materials as part of the ongoing update and solicitation process.

Project Managers also informed the Board that the State of Georgia was currently experiencing drought conditions, which they noted was likely contributing to the increased regional attention and focus surrounding water infrastructure and long-term water supply planning. They reported that Lake Lanier was currently approximately five feet below its normal pool level. Project Managers explained that, historically, the lake would typically be approaching normal operating levels around that time of year in preparation for the summer season; however, current weather forecasts did not project significant rainfall between the current period and June. As a result, regional stakeholders were beginning to assess the possibility of entering the summer months already operating from a water deficit condition and evaluating the potential implications associated with those shortages.

Project Managers then reminded the Board of prior regional partnership discussions held approximately one year earlier. They stated that, around April of the prior year, outreach efforts had been made to numerous regional entities and stakeholders, including representatives from:

- Carroll County,
- Coweta County,
- Douglas County,
- Data center representatives,
- The Fulton County Development Authority,
- Representatives associated with the Atlanta region.

Project Managers stated that, during those earlier discussions, the Authority had also been instructed not to directly contact certain municipalities at that time. They explained that many of the previously contacted entities expressed general interest in future collaboration; however, several jurisdictions were simultaneously engaged in their own infrastructure projects, bond issuances, or internal planning processes, causing discussions to be postponed for future consideration.

Project Managers stated that the current timing may now present a more favorable opportunity to revisit those earlier conversations and reengage regional stakeholders under a broader collaborative framework focused on regional water planning rather than solely Authority-specific partnerships.

Project Managers also recommended that the Authority ensure neighboring counties remained included in future regional discussions and summit planning efforts. They stated that they would be willing to reconnect with previously identified county and regional contacts to gauge interest in attending and participating in future regional water summit discussions.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones acknowledged the update and noted that Danny Johnson had similarly emphasized the importance of involving jurisdictions such as Coweta County and Clayton County in future regional water discussions.

Project Managers responded that those jurisdictions were already aware of the broader discussions and confirmed that multiple prior conversations had occurred specifically with Coweta County regarding potential future collaboration opportunities, including discussions related to partnering on the construction of a specific water intake project. Project Managers stated that the current timing appeared favorable for reengaging those conversations.

Project Managers then transitioned discussion to the Authority's continuing efforts to replace or replicate certain planning and analytical components that had originally been expected through the discontinued Georgia Tech program initiative. They noted that one of the anticipated benefits of that program was the completion of a regional water rate survey designed to better evaluate current water pricing structures and forecast future regional rate trends.

Project Managers stated that, while searching for alternative resources, they discovered a newly developed water rate dashboard published through the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA). They explained that the dashboard allows users to review water rate information for municipalities throughout Georgia, including median income data and various indicators intended to help evaluate whether municipalities are appropriately balancing water pricing with operational expenses.

Project Managers stated that they were initially uncertain regarding the reliability and usefulness of the tool due to its recent release. However, after conducting discussions with GEFA staff in March, they learned that the dashboard had been developed in partnership with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, which increased their confidence in both the validity of the data and the long-term usefulness of the platform.

Project Managers further explained that the Carl Vinson Institute had been actively collecting water rate data directly from municipalities throughout the state, which they believed strengthened the accuracy of the underlying information being utilized within the dashboard.

Project Managers noted that the current dashboard functionality presented some limitations, specifically regarding the ability to compare multiple municipalities simultaneously within a single report. However, they suggested that the Carl Vinson Institute may be able to assist directly by generating a customized comparative report for the Authority.

Project Managers requested the Board's approval to contact representatives from the Carl Vinson Institute to explore whether they could provide a customized regional comparison report examining water rates among the Authority's participating municipalities as well as several other jurisdictions that had recently completed major water infrastructure projects. Project Managers stated that such a report could potentially provide the Authority with much of the same analytical information originally anticipated from the prior Georgia Tech initiative while utilizing an already publicly funded resource made available through GEFA.

All Board members expressed agreement with the proposed outreach to the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and spoke positively regarding the Institute's reputation and capabilities.

Project Managers stated that they would proceed with contacting the Carl Vinson Institute regarding the potential development of a customized regional water rate comparison report.

Water Affordability

The Project Managers stated that the Board had consistently recognized that future investments in water supply infrastructure and long-term regional planning would likely require substantial financial investment, which could ultimately result in increased water rates for residents and customers throughout the participating municipalities.

Project Managers noted that many residents within the region live on fixed incomes and that affordability concerns would likely become increasingly important as future infrastructure investments and water rate adjustments are considered. As a result, Project Managers stated that they had begun researching existing affordability assistance programs and identifying organizations that could potentially educate the Board regarding available models and partnership opportunities.

Project Managers highlighted DeKalb County as a nearby example. They explained that DeKalb County recently faced the need to invest billions of dollars into aging water infrastructure improvements and system upgrades. Because those improvements required significant financial investment, the county implemented annual water rate increases of approximately 10% per year over a ten-year period.

Project Managers stated that, in an effort to reduce the financial burden on lower-income and fixed-income residents, DeKalb County partnered with the Urban League of Greater Atlanta to administer a water affordability and assistance program. They noted that the partnership structure was particularly interesting because the nonprofit organization handled much of the operational administration of the program, including:

- Managing applications,
- Operating the application website,
- Communicating with residents,
- Reviewing eligibility,
- Administering the program directly.

Project Managers stated that they had not previously encountered a county-nonprofit utility assistance partnership structured in that manner and therefore reached out directly to the Urban League to learn more about the model.

Project Managers reported that representatives from the Urban League expressed enthusiasm regarding the inquiry and indicated a willingness to speak with the participating cities about potential future partnerships or affordability assistance programs. Project Managers clarified that, because the Authority itself only directly serves three municipal customers rather than retail residential consumers, any future affordability initiatives would likely need to operate at the city level where direct retail utility customers are served.

Chairman Tony Phillips then asked Project Managers to provide a broader overview of what the DeKalb County partnership specifically involved and what role the Urban League played within the process.

Project Managers explained that, based on their current understanding, the Urban League primarily handled staffing and administrative functions associated with the program, including reviewing applications, operating the public-facing website and intake process, and assisting with overall implementation and customer communication. Project Managers noted that their understanding remained preliminary but reiterated that Urban League representatives had expressed willingness to attend a future meeting to provide more detailed information and educate the Board further regarding available options and best practices.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones stated that she was familiar with similar utility assistance partnerships through organizations such as the United Way and noted that utility assistance discussions had previously occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that, during prior utility assistance efforts, nonprofit partners handled most administrative aspects of the programs, including:

- Receiving applications,
- Reviewing eligibility,
- Distributing assistance funds,
- Providing required reporting and documentation.

Mayor Portis-Jones further noted that additional nonprofit organizations also provide similar services and stated that her city had subsequently partnered with another organization for later rounds of utility assistance distribution. She expressed support for further exploring such partnership opportunities moving forward.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith then referenced prior Board discussions regarding separating residential, industrial, and commercial water rate structures and asked whether additional information or analysis had been developed surrounding those concepts as the Authority continued evaluating future affordability strategies.

Project Managers responded that the recently discussed Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) rate dashboard already contained distinctions between residential and industrial rate categories. They further explained that, from a rate-setting perspective, providing reduced or subsidized rates for residential customers would likely require offsetting revenue increases elsewhere within the rate structure, including potentially higher rates for industrial or commercial users to support affordability initiatives.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones added that, during DeKalb County's major water rate restructuring process, the county also implemented tiered rate-setting strategies. She stated that the Board had previously discussed tiered rate concepts and expressed interest in receiving additional education regarding how such structures are designed and implemented.

Mayor Portis-Jones further requested that Project Managers identify representatives from DeKalb County who were directly involved in developing and implementing those tiered rate-setting models so that they could potentially participate in future discussions and provide insight into the process and lessons learned.

Project Managers continued discussion regarding financial assistance mechanisms and affordability strategies associated with future water infrastructure investments and rate adjustments.

Project Managers stated that the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) maintains guidance and programs related to financial capability assessments, which evaluate what communities can reasonably afford relative to water infrastructure costs and utility rate structures. They explained that the EPA provides various

frameworks and assistance concepts designed to help utilities balance infrastructure needs with affordability concerns for residents.

Project Managers noted that, while some federal funding programs are currently inactive pending additional congressional appropriations, the EPA continues to advocate for expanded financial assistance opportunities and affordability initiatives nationwide.

Project Managers further explained that affordability assistance can take several forms beyond simple rate reductions. They outlined several approaches discussed within EPA guidance materials, including:

- Discounted or subsidized rate structures,
- Flexible payment arrangements,
- Structured payment plans,
- Partial forgiveness programs,
- Lifeline rates,
- Temporary emergency assistance programs,
- Water efficiency and conservation initiatives.

Project Managers explained that flexible payment structures could involve formalized repayment arrangements for customers who fall behind on utility payments, such as structured installment plans designed to spread delinquent balances over time in a more manageable way.

They also described “lifeline rate” structures, which provide qualifying low-income customers with access to a fixed amount of essential water usage at a reduced or subsidized rate. Under such models, customers would receive discounted rates for a baseline level of necessary water consumption, while any usage above that threshold would be billed at standard rates.

Project Managers additionally referenced temporary assistance programs and water conservation strategies already being utilized by many municipalities as part of broader affordability and sustainability efforts.

Project Managers emphasized that additional research and discussion would be necessary as the Authority continued evaluating future affordability options and long-term infrastructure funding strategies.

Project Managers further suggested that, as part of future discussions with DeKalb County representatives, the Board may wish to explore whether DeKalb County relied solely upon water rate increases to fund its infrastructure improvements or whether additional funding sources such as millage rate adjustments or property tax increases were also utilized. They noted that affordability impacts may affect renters and non-homeowners differently than property owners, making broader funding structure discussions important.

Chairman Tony Phillips acknowledged that the assumptions underlying prior affordability models and projections may have changed significantly over time and agreed that examining the broader funding structure behind DeKalb County’s approach would be valuable.

Georgia Rural Water Association

They stated that GEFA had connected them with Jake Matthews, whom GEFA described as a significant resource regarding rural water systems, utility rate structures, and statewide infrastructure financing challenges. Project

Managers stated that they planned to speak with Mr. Matthews the following week to gather additional insight regarding how increasing infrastructure costs are impacting communities throughout Georgia.

Project Managers noted that Palmetto qualifies as a rural corridor entity, making it eligible for certain forms of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funding that are not available to the Authority's other participating municipalities due to population thresholds.

Project Managers then provided an update regarding prior discussions with Kennesaw State University concerning potential GIS-related internship and practicum opportunities. They stated that Kennesaw State University indicated a willingness to support GIS projects during the summer semester provided the participating cities could supply:

- Proposed project descriptions,
- Start and end dates,
- Estimated project durations,
- Hour requirements,
- Compensation information (paid or unpaid),
- Work format details (in-person, remote, or hybrid).

Project Managers explained that the university structures internship and practicum experiences in 50-hour increments, including:

- 50-hour,
- 100-hour,
- 150-hour,
- 200-hour project formats.

They stated that the university would use that information to determine student interest and availability for summer participation. Project Managers noted that participation would likely function similarly to individualized internship placements matching student interests and project requirements.

Project Managers clarified that those opportunities would specifically involve students enrolled within Kennesaw State University's GIS program.

Project Managers then returned to discussion regarding the previously referenced Georgia Institute of Technology capstone program initiative. They stated that they had recently spoken directly with one of the lead professors overseeing the capstone program and received additional clarification regarding how the process operates.

Project Managers explained that:

- The capstone program operates during fall and spring semesters only,
- Fall semesters typically involve approximately 20 student teams,
- Spring semesters typically involve approximately 25 student teams,
- Each team generally consists of four students,
- Projects are estimated at approximately 400 total project hours,

- Students generally contribute approximately 10 hours per week each.

Project Managers further explained that participating clients must submit brief project presentation materials, generally consisting of two to three slides, during July for consideration in the upcoming academic cycle. Once students return in August, they organize themselves into project teams based upon academic interests such as civil engineering or environmental engineering. Student teams then review the available project list, rank their preferences, and submit proposals explaining how they would approach selected projects.

Project Managers stated that project assignments are ultimately determined based upon student interest and faculty review, and participating cities or the Authority would generally receive notice in August regarding whether their project had been selected for participation.

Project Managers further explained that capstone projects typically run from September through December and require approximately 30 minutes of weekly coordination between project sponsors and student teams. For projects involving engineering or technical expertise, faculty also request that participating entities designate technical representatives capable of answering project-related questions during those meetings.

Project Managers noted that the capstone program requires some form of design component as part of the final deliverable. They explained that acceptable projects could include:

- Infrastructure modeling,
- Utility infrastructure mapping,
- Preliminary engineering concepts,
- System connection planning,
- Design-oriented GIS analysis.

Project Managers stated that the program seeks projects involving some form of tangible visual or technical design outcome rather than purely administrative or data-only projects.

Project Managers cautioned that project selection cannot be guaranteed and noted that student interest varies from semester to semester. They explained that some projects may not receive student interest during one term but may become highly sought-after during subsequent semesters.

Project Managers further stated that the university attempts to distribute projects across multiple participating cities and organizations rather than assigning numerous projects to a single entity during a single semester.

Project Managers advised the participating cities and the Authority to begin considering which potential projects they may wish to submit for future capstone participation opportunities.

Finally, Project Managers noted that the capstone program also requires at least one site visit by participating students. They explained that the program has received national recognition and that, in some cases, Georgia Tech alumni associations have even funded student travel for field visits associated with significant projects located outside the Atlanta region. Project Managers clarified that participating clients themselves are not expected to bear the cost of those student field visits.

Councilmember Brian Jones asked whether the Board had previously discussed the possibility of paid internships and sought clarification regarding the distinction between the proposed Kennesaw State University summer GIS opportunities and the Georgia Institute of Technology capstone program anticipated for the fall semester.

Project Managers clarified that the Kennesaw State opportunity was not structured as a large-scale formal internship pipeline program. Instead, they described it as a more individualized and project-specific arrangement where students could participate in targeted GIS-related assignments or practicum experiences based upon municipal needs and student availability. Project Managers stated that such experiences could provide significant value for students seeking practical local government and infrastructure-related experience within the Atlanta region.

Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones stated that she strongly supported internship opportunities, noting that she personally participated in internship programs during both high school and college and considered those experiences to be extremely valuable and formative.

Project Managers agreed and stated that internship and practicum opportunities often provide students with real-world problem-solving experience that extends beyond classroom or textbook instruction. They explained that such experiences allow students to demonstrate practical application of their skills and gain exposure to professional environments, which can be highly beneficial when seeking future employment opportunities.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith referenced discussions held during a recent National League of Cities (NLC) meeting, where participants emphasized the growing importance of hiring based upon lived experience and demonstrated practical ability in addition to formal academic credentials. She noted that the discussions focused on recognizing experiential learning and real-world application as valuable workforce development tools.

Project Managers then stated that, if the participating cities wished to continue exploring GIS internship or practicum opportunities through Kennesaw State University, they would be willing to reconnect with university representatives and continue facilitating those discussions. They clarified that the Kennesaw State opportunities would specifically involve GIS-related projects and would likely need to be driven by the individual municipalities rather than the Authority itself.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith noted that Palmetto had recently undertaken efforts to purchase and assume ownership of its GIS-related data and mapping resources after previously relying upon an outside entity to manage portions of the work. She stated that the city now needed to continue updating and maintaining those systems and acknowledged that the process involved ongoing technical work and data management responsibilities.

Project Managers responded that participating cities could continue internal discussions regarding their individual GIS needs and then reach out directly if they wished assistance coordinating potential partnerships or internship opportunities through Kennesaw State University.

Councilmember Brian Jones noted that the timing considerations may require relatively prompt action because schools would soon be ending their academic year and summer planning windows would be approaching quickly.

Project Managers agreed and reiterated that those opportunities would likely need to be coordinated at the city level rather than through the Authority itself. They stated that, if any of the participating cities wished to move forward, they would be willing to assist in facilitating coordination and communication during the interim period.

Project Managers concluded by noting that the Authority itself remains somewhat limited operationally because it does not currently function as a fully staffed independent entity, making it more practical for individual cities to directly manage and oversee such internship opportunities at this stage.

I. Other Business

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith provided an update regarding ongoing audit efforts within the Palmetto and their impact on the Authority. She stated that the issue of outstanding audits had been an ongoing topic of discussion throughout her tenure as Mayor and her service on the Authority Board.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith acknowledged that the Authority had experienced significant challenges related to audit completion and compliance over several years. She reported that the City of Palmetto had recently retained an outside company to assist with bringing the city's audits current and resolving the outstanding backlog.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith further explained that the outside firm is now providing regular monthly audit updates and actively working through the city's outstanding audit years. She stated that the current plan is to complete approximately four years of outstanding audits over a two-year period.

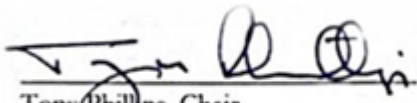
Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith noted that the 2022 audit year had presented particularly significant challenges and described it as a major obstacle for the city over the past several years. However, she expressed optimism that, once the 2022 audit is completed, the process should begin flowing more smoothly because the city is simultaneously implementing improved systems, procedures, and operational structures designed to support timely audit completion moving forward.

Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith concluded by assuring the Board that the City of Palmetto remains committed to resolving the outstanding audit issues and expressed hope that the matter would not continue to place a significant burden on the Authority for much longer.

II. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m. was made by Mayor Teresa Thomas-Smith and seconded by Mayor Vince Williams.

Vote: 7-0; Motion Carried



Tony Phillips, Chair



Jessica Davis, Secretary