

CITY OF CORNELIA
MINUTES OF WORKSHOP MEETING
January 7, 2025

The Cornelia City Commission met in a Workshop Session on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at 5:00 PM in the Cornelia Municipal Building Conference Room, 181 Larkin Street, Cornelia, GA. Mayor, John Borrow, called the meeting to order and the following Commissioners were present: Tony Cook, Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, and Don Bagwell. Also, present: City Attorney, Steve Campbell, City Manager, Donald Anderson, Public Safety Director, Chad Smith, Public Works Director, Clif McEntyre, Finance Director, Melanie Chandler, CIO Director, Jeremy Dundore and City Clerk, Debbie Turner.

Mayor Borrow opened the meeting

Public Safety Director, Chad Smith gave his annual report. Mr. Smith said that all the calls have increased in 2024, and the Fire Marshall's office is currently vacant, so we are looking to do some restructuring of the department. The calls that were responded to were a little less than 1500 and the goals that were set for last year have been met. Mr. Smith said that the Fire Department and Police Department are now training together and that they had trained for a school shooting incident before the Apalachee school shooting. The fire department is also working closer with the water department as far as the fire hydrants and documenting how much water they use for training and fire calls. They have decreased the response time to calls which will help with the ISO rating. All the firefighters are trained as car seat technicians with the exceptions of three. Mr. Smith said that Probation is doing very well, and they have implemented a plan where if people who are on probation must work and cannot do Community Service, they can now provide car seats in exchange for the Community Service. Mr. Smith said that our Building Inspector now holds thirty-three certifications as well as being a Certified Building Inspector. He went over the Police Department stats and stated that keeping officers is an ongoing problem, we train them, and they leave after the 2-year contract is over. We are also seeing where other jurisdictions are buying out their contracts before the 2 years is up to keep from having to send them to the academy. The Drug Investigator position has been filled, and he is also on the FBI taskforce so part of the costs are paid by the federal government. He did say that crime has went up. Commissioner Cook asked if it is because of gangs or population. He said it could be a little of both. His report is an integral part of the minutes.

Public Works, Clif McEntyre gave his report and stated that all

sanitation routes, Chipper routes, leaf vac routes were completed during the year. Flower Beds, City Parks and Public restrooms were also maintained. Mr. McEntyre said that all potholes were fixed as well as anything else that needed to be repaired. Commissioner Reed asked him what it is favorite highlight of the year; He said that the events that the city hosts are always fun as well as the Christmas Decorations in Cornelia. Mayor Borrow said that he has received so many compliments about how great the city looked and that was at the beginning of December and that was all thanks to his department. His report is an integral part of the minutes.

CIO Director, Jeremy Dundore gave his report stating that they have closed about one thousand tickets in 2024. He said he has Brad Gowder at the help desk at city hall and Matt Arnold on the Police side and they are doing great. Commissioner Reed asked how the tickets come in; he said they come in through the help desk. Mr. Dundore said he is focused on Security and Awareness, AI being one of the biggest concerns. Mr. Dundore said that he has at least six big projects this year, the biggest is converting to our new software Tyler as well as the Amphitheater Project and the Wastewater Project. His report is an integral part of the minutes.

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor

CITY OF CORNELIA
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
January 7, 2025

The Cornelia City Commission met in a Regular Session on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the Cornelia Municipal Building Conference Room, 181 Larkin Street, Cornelia, GA. Mayor, John Borrow, called the meeting to order and the following Commissioners were present: Tony Cook, Janice Griggs, Mark Reed, and Don Bagwell. Also, present: City Attorney, Steve Campbell, City Manager, Donald Anderson, Finance Director, Melanie Chandler, CIO Director, Jerremy Dundore and City Clerk, Debbie Turner.

Fire Chief, Billy Jenkins gave the invocation and Commissioner Cook led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Reed made a motion to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 -0

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to approve the December 3rd minutes as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

City Manager's Annual Report- We began 2024 with the mayor and I attending a meeting of water providers in our region to discuss the possibility of creating a Northeast Georgia Water Authority. To date there has not been a follow up meeting regarding this matter. We celebrated Arbor Day on February 16th by planting Trees on property owned by the city located on Moss Street. The trees were funded with grant funds from the Georgia Tree Council's ReLeaf Program. We also received the Tree City designation for the 33rd year in a row. We engaged the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to update the Downtown Master Plan to include the site of the proposed Amphitheater. This site plan has been used by our engineers to develop the plans for the project. In March we hosted a cleanup around our drinking water reservoir. We had 9 volunteers help with the cleanup and they picked up 300 pounds of garbage. In April we completed the Market Corners Drive Road and Sidewalk Project. The project also included Georgia Power placing decorative streetlamps along the road. The new road is a huge improvement over what was here before. Also, in April we submitted our Supplemental LMIG application to assist with the 2025 Paving Project. We received an additional \$91,000 from the state to help with the cost of the project.

In May we completed the Tim Loves Tink Mural Project on Front Street. This project was a combination of community involvement and our Public Works Department. The project was funded in part by a Georgia Vibrant Communities Grant. The end result is a beautiful mural that has turned into a tourist attraction for downtown. Also, in May the Cornelia Hospitality & Tourism Board held another successful Music Festival. This year's Music Festival will be May 17th and will be the first event at the new Entertainment Park. In June we finalized the agreement with GDOT for their portion of the rail crossing project. Also in June, local artist Annabelle Jackson completed this year's Fire Hydrant project. We painted 3 fire hydrants in downtown with designs from students at Cornelia Elementary, South Hab Middle School, and Tallulah Falls School. In July we helped Mrs. Johnson remove the boat from the property that we purchased from her for the new park. We also relocated the locomotive to behind the caboose on Clarkesville Street. Also, in July we received notice that we received a \$1 million ARC Grant to help with the cost of the new Amphitheater. The mayor and I met with representatives of the U.S. Forest Service about their plans for Chenocetah Tower. They have applied for grant funds to make repairs to the tower and cleanup the trees around the tower. This will be a 3-year process with the first step being the creation of the plan. In August Norfolk Southern finally completed the long-awaited rail crossing project. While they were performing the work Congress Clyde made a visit to downtown to see the site of the Amphitheater. He spent a good deal of time visiting with the rail workers. He also toured our downtown and was very impressed with its transformation. Also, in August we received notice that we once again received a \$1 million CDBG Grant. This year's grant will be used to help with the cost of the East Walnut Street Water Main Project. We also received 2 GEFA loans totaling \$4.6 million. These funds will be used for the Old Level Grove Water Line Project and the Hazel Creek Pumping Station Project. Code Enforcement began working with Ninth District regarding the growing homeless population in the city. Ninth District offers a host of services to Homeless People that we were not aware of. These services include Workforce Development, a mobile clinic, and assistance with temporary housing. In September we once again held a very successful Big Red Apple Festival! The weather was perfect, and thousands of people flocked to downtown for the event. Hurricane Helene roared through the area causing some trees to fall. The storm knocked power out to most of the area, but Georgia Power was able to get the power restored quickly. In October we received notice that the Historic

Preservation Division approved the Amphitheater Project. Once we received this notice Carter & Sloope kicked it into high gear on the plans and we were able to put the project out for bid on November 27th. The new Fairfield Inn opened its doors on October 29th! I have spoken with the owners, and they are picking up a few more customers every day. In November we officially kicked off the Christmas season with the Downtown Tree Lighting Ceremony and the second annual Dashing Through the Lights 5K. Once again over 100 runners took part in the event. In December we hosted the annual Habersham County Christmas Parade. The parade showcased over 30 floats and despite the cold weather it was very well attended. Baldwin will host the parade next year. Also, in December we received the Notice to Proceed from ARC for the Amphitheater Project. City workers have begun the demolition of the existing buildings and cleaning up the property. The contractor should begin the grading portion of the project sometime this month. Projects to look forward to in 2025 include Phase I of the Amphitheater Project. We hope to complete the improvements to the old reservoir which was originally funded in 2012. The much-needed expansion to the Wastewater Plant should go out for bid in March. This will expand our capacity from 3 mgd. to 4.5 mgd. We have several economic development projects in the planning phase that will continue to make Cornelia the economic engine of Habersham County. These projects along with the dedication of our city employees give me the confidence to say that 2025 will once again be another successful year for the City of Cornelia. This report is made an integral part of the minutes.

Public Forum

Old Business: None

Public Hearings: Public Hearing on HB 581 Floating Homestead Exemption

Mayor Borrow opened the Public Hearing and City Manager Anderson went over the bill. City Attorney, Steve Campbell said that the bill is pretty fascinating in the fact that if everybody opts in and you are a property owner and pay city taxes, first this bill would limit the amount that you can be taxed for example if your house is valued at \$100,000 in 2024 at a 3% inflation then it would be \$103,000 or whatever the inflation is. Mr. Campbell said also if there is a referendum and the 1% sales tax passes then they will use that money

to reduce your taxes. He said they are going to use all the people that come here and shop, eat etc. they will use all that money to further reduce your taxes. Mr. Campbell said even if it is another penny tax you can count me in, he said I say that as a citizen. Kristy Lewellen Came forward and said that she knows a little on the law, but she said that if we held an election, she was not sure it would pass. Ms. Lewellen said that she thinks that if it were good for the cities, it would not be good for the county. Commissioner Reed said that if the county stays in and we hold a 1% referendum, and it passes then the county would get a large portion of it. Finance Director, Melanie Chandler spoke and said that what the county is offering is a Homestead Exemption Freeze and that this bill would not affect it. City Manager Anderson stated that it is the cities that have to opt in. Ms. Lewellen said she feels more information is needed. Mayor Borrow said it is a little confusing and that we are all still learning but that is why we are holding the Public Hearings and thanked her for coming. Commissioner Reed gave Ms. Lewellen the frequently asked questions part of the bill. Mayor Borrow closed the Public Hearing.

New Business:

Fire Department Pinning Ceremony - Fire Chief Jenkins came forward to announce the promotions of Matthew Willams and Kyle Shelton. Chief Jenkins said that the promotions were in June, and they are both enrolled in EMT B Classes. He said that Kyle Shelton has been with the fire department since 2023 and has earned numerous certifications since then. He was promoted to Operations Lieutenant and his wife Callie and son Lane pinned him. The second promotion is for Matthew Willams he was promoted to Captain. He has been a firefighter since 2015 and is known for his mentorship to other firefighters. His wife Alyssa and their three sons Brantley, Cash and Walker pinned him. Mayor Borrow thanked them both for their commitment to the city and its citizens.

Georgia Power Lighting Agreement for Amphitheater - City Manager Anderson said that based on the site plan for the Amphitheater Park Georgia Power recommends that we install 13 decorative streetlights along the walking trail and the food truck path. The cost for these lights will be \$93,600 up front and then a monthly cost of \$354.51 for the electrical service and maintenance. Commission Cook made a motion to approve the lighting

Cornelia City Commission

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agreement with Georgia Power, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Automatic Aid Agreement with the City of Demorest - City Manager Anderson said that we currently have an agreement with the City of Demorest for fire protection. The terms of the agreement our fire department will respond with our ladder truck and to personnel to all fires, fire alarms, and smoke/odor call in Demorest. The city of Demorest will also respond with the same terms and conditions. Under this agreement the terms will be for 5 years and either party may terminate the agreement with a 60-day written notice. Commissioner Reed made a motion to sign the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

GEFA Loan #DSL20223088 - We are federally mandated to locate and for lead and copper water lines by 2026. To complete the project, we have been approved for a GEFA loan in the amount of \$244,000 with \$109,800 in principal forgiveness. This means will be responsible for paying back \$134,200 at an interest rate of 1.98% over 20 years. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to authorize the Mayor to sign the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Resolution Adopting Language Action Plan - City Manager said that according to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 we are required to provide access to services of all Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons within our community. The developed action plan based on the four-factor analysis as it relates to the 2024 CDBG funding requirements will meet the requirements. Commissioner Reed made a motion to adopt the plan, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Ordinance #01-25-01 Grease Trap Requirements - Section 12-275 of the Municipal Code states that all users involved in the preparation of food for commercial purposes shall provide oil/grease interceptors or traps. There are some restaurants that does not use grease while preparing their food so this amendment would eliminate this sentence that requires all restaurants to have a grease trap. Commissioner Reed made a motion to post the amendment, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Budget Adjustment to Balance 2024 Budget - City Manager Anderson stated that we need to make two adjustments to balance the 2024 budget. The first is for the Market Corners Street Improvement Project. The project

was not completed in 2023 as planned, and the 2024 Budget did not include funding for the remainder of the project. The second one is for \$86,000 for the Pine Street Drainage Project. The Storm Water Utility Capital Fund did not have enough funds available to cover this project, so we had to pull from Reserve Funds to complete the project. Commissioner Cook made a motion to make the Budget Adjustments for 2024, seconded by Commissioner Bagwell. Approved 4 - 0

Engineer's Recommendation for the Amphitheater Park Project - The bid opening for the 1st Phase of the Amphitheater Project was held on December 31, 2024. Phase 1 includes everything except the construction of the stage and dressing rooms. We received one bid from Higgins Construction in the amount of \$1,833,489. The budgeted amount is \$2,525,000, \$1,000,000 ARC Grant, \$1,000,000 General Fund, and \$525,000 in SPLOST. The restrooms are not included in the bid because we are still pricing the modular units that will be installed. Carter & Sloope recommends that we include an allowance of up to \$200,000 for the restrooms. The total cost will be \$2,033,489. Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to approve the bid from Higgins Construction of \$1,833,489 and make an allowance of \$200,000 for the restrooms, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Qualifying Fees - The qualifying fees need to be set by February 1, 2025. The qualifying fee for these seats will be \$72.00. Commissioner Reed made a motion to set the fee at \$72.00, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Executive Session for Real Estate

Commissioner Reed made a motion to exit the regular session and enter into executive session, seconded by Commissioner Griggs. Approved 4 - 0

Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to exit the executive session and enter into the regular session. Approved 4 - 0

No Action Taken!

Adjourn - Commissioner Bagwell made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Cook. Approved 4 - 0

Debbie Turner, City Clerk

John Borrow, Mayor

AFFIDAVIT OF PRESIDING OFFICIAL(S) FOR A CLOSED PUBLIC MEETING

While in Regular Session, the motion was made to enter an Executive Session to discuss certain matters in a closed session.

(x) To discuss with council pending and/or potential litigation, settlement claims, administrative proceedings or other judicial actions, which is exempt from the Open Meetings Act pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-2(1).

() A meeting to discuss the purchase, disposal of, or lease of property; authorize the ordering of an appraisal related to the acquisition or disposal of real estate; enter into a contract to purchase, dispose of, or lease property subject to approval in a subsequent public vote; or enter into an option to purchase, dispose of, or lease real estate subject to approval in subsequent public vote, which is excluded from the Open Meetings Act pursuant to Section 50-14-3(b)(1)(C).

() A meeting discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, hiring, disciplinary action or dismissal, or periodic evaluation or rating of a public officer or employee, which is excluded pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-3(b)(2).

() Discussion in Executive Session of Records that are otherwise protected from disclosure under the Open Records Act as pursuant to O.C.G.A. Section 50-14-3- (b)(4).

X The subject matter of the Executive Session of the Regular Session was devoted to matters within the exceptions provided by law.

___ Because of events occurring during the closed session, I am unable to affirm the subject matter of the Executive Session of the Regular Session was devoted to only matters within the exceptions provided by law.

John Borrow, Mayor, City of Cornelia

Sworn to and subscribed before me this

Notary Public