

Minutes for the Cochran City Council 2024 Retreat

March 14-16, 2024

Little Ocmulgee State Park, McRae GA

Members present:

Mayor, Billy Yeomans

Mayor Pro Tem, Carla Coley

Councilmembers: Keith Anderson, Gary Ates, Andrew Lemmon, Shane Savant, Lonnie Tedders

Facilitator, Dr. Carrie T. Hamilton, University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute

City Manager, Richard Newbern, Police Chief, Jeff Trawick, Fire Chief, Brock Wilcher, Public Works Director, Willie Farrow, Interim City Clerk, Julie Peche, City Attorney, Jim Elliott

Meeting called to order @ 8:00 am

Mayor Yeomans gave the invocation.

Police Chief, Jeff Trawick led the pledge of allegiance.

Thursday, March 14

8:00 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.

Welcome by Mayor Billy Yeomans. Introduction of Dr. Carrie Hamilton, Retreat Facilitator

8:15 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Dr. Carrie Hamilton, Facilitator

Welcomed all in attendance. Stated purpose, goals, and expectations of the retreat. Established the retreat ground rules.

8:30 a.m.– 10:30 a.m.

Dr. Carrie Hamilton, Facilitator

Focus will be on: Council roles, conduct, perception, accountability, understanding, and forming bonds.

Be hard on the issues, not each other.

Suspend disbelief. Be willing to listen.

Cultivate curiosity.

Be flexible.

Have grace.

Retreat Goals will focus on strategies of effective communication, collaboration, and building trust for success.

Expectations: To be able to look at things from a different vantage point. Focus on the well-being of the community. Remove distractions and devote time to work. Develop relationships with one another.

- 10:45 a.m. - 12:00 Noon. Dr. Carrie Hamilton: Professional Development
- People are motivated by 2 feelings: Love and Fear. To address the needs of our citizens, we need to determine what we each bring to the table. What are our strengths and weaknesses? If we were to give each citizen a penny and ask them “A penny for your thoughts?” what would we hear? Do our words meet our actions? Do we come together to collaborate? As council members, we need to make empowered decisions that provide comfort and safety to the City’s residents.
- Focus on these sections of the City Charter: 2.16-Council, 2.3-City Manager, 2.33-Mayor.
- The 7 “C”s of Communication: Clear, Concise, Concrete, Correct, Coherent, Complete, Courteous.
- 12:00 p.m. – 1:00p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Tony King, Financial Consultant Crews and Assoc.
Tony King distributed a power point presentation to outline the focus of his discussion. Points of interest: Inflation exceeds our normal consumer rates even with rate increases. We must increase our revenues, or our cash balances will decline.
All funds should stand on their own. Normally, all “A” rated Cities have a 30 % fund balance.
In 2023, Solid Waste fund expenses exceeded revenues by \$75,430. Rates were increased by the Council effective 10-1-2023 by 5%. Expenses increased by 2% so we should see a benefit to the fund in 2024. Solid Waste contract up for renewal in 2026.
IMPORTANT: do not forget the 2 GEFA Loan repayments at \$200,000 per year. Must take a close look at our revenue and debt repayment. Will be a budget item in our next budget.
Starting in 2025 there should be a 2.5% increase in all services each year to keep up with increases in expenses. We will need these increases to keep our General Fund healthy.
- 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p. m. Richard Newbern, City Manager discussion of SPLOST, and other funding.
Discussion of utility billing and collection for past due accounts with Council. The council asked for a written policy or procedure for cutoffs for residential and commercial accounts. Discussion on MGAG and

what they could provide to Cochran to help to “sell” our gas services and increase gas revenues.

SPLOST referendum pending for May vote to extend for 6 more years. We need to look at all funding and adjust as needed.

Jim Elliott made a statement that if we need to increase revenue, we need to look at the millage rate this year.

3:30 p. m. – 4:00 p.m.

Commissioner Mike Davis - Discussion of joint opportunities.

Mr. Davis spoke to the Council about working together. Willing to work with IDA, DDA, Chamber. We went through LOST and SPLOST negotiations but today I am here to say what can I do for the City? Points to address with further discussions: Appearance of Downtown. Tapping into College revenue potentials. Improving Airport and student interaction. Continue working together with Law enforcement and Public works. Improve the Fire service relationship between County and City.

One area the City asks for improvement in is the use of City Fire Hydrants and water usage by County Fire services. Commissioner agreed to address with the County Fire Chief.

The Commissioner would like to schedule a quarterly meeting/dinner with the Mayor, Council, City Manager to discuss issues.

4:00 p.m. – 4:45 p. m

Session with IDA, Andy Lucas, Chamber of Commerce, Melissa Barker, and DDA rep.

Chamber – Melissa Barker

Planning events for the Summer to increase foot traffic for our Cochran businesses. Planning the first Pickleball 2-day event to encourage out-of-town participants to spend the night in Cochran. Would like to hold a class on the myths and realities of funding for small business. Build our Social Media platforms. Redevelop the Arts Alliance portion of the Municipal building into a Chamber event hall. The Chamber asks the City to help make this happen.

IDA – Andy Lucas

Planning on continuing to develop the Industrial Park and work on the economic part of industrial development. We need to move the infrastructure part along. Would like to have that ready so that a potential business would not need to wait 2 years to get started on the construction of a facility. Would like a timetable (a 2-to-5-year plan) for development to have the services available to potential industry.

One issue is the annexation of the section of the highway to the park. Has Rep. Mathis introduced the bill? It has not been introduced. There is further language required to propose this. It looks like it will be in January 2025.

DDA - Robert Fordham Board Chairman.

DDA recently lost the President and several board members, but those positions have been filled. Ken Land will be the new part-time DDA director. DDA is working closely with the College, downtown property owners on rent, building appearance, and traffic into the downtown area. Looking for ways to increase foot traffic into the downtown stores. One item of concern is the appearance of downtown. DDA made a commitment for the next year to fund seasonal window art on vacant buildings. Lots of positive comments on this. DDA will continue to take small steps to make downtown better. Enjoys working with the Chamber and the City.

4:45 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Air -Med, Wendy Simpson

Gave attendees a brochure listing services and asked for the city to consider her company's services to employees as an additional payroll deduction for those interested.

5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Falcon Engineering and Design - Skip Layton

Review City infrastructure:

Sewer: Sewer issues make up 4.5 million of the total 6.5 million in the City's GEFA loans. Our system is around 70 years old with many miles of clay pipes. Infiltration is an issue. Approximately 6 miles of pipe has been replaced with about 20 miles left to replace. Remember to budget for the continued replacement of these lines.

Water: Provided by 4 wells. Wells went through a major overall that cost half a million dollars. Currently EPD requires a washout of the tanks every 2 years. This is done on a rotating basis so there will still be the correct production levels. This is an ongoing expense. There are still a lot of transmission lines that are asbestos/concrete. Pressure issues (such as fire hydrant cut on and offs) cause damage. These pipes are old and will need future attention.

Storm Water: Cochran does not have a complete designed storm water system. One issue is the different size pipes used. It would be prohibitively expensive to do a complete basin analysis. One of the current T-SPLOST projects is addressing a storm water issue. All of Cochran's drainage flows into Jordan Creek. This waterway is on the State impaired waterway list. That is due to silt going into this stream.

Most is from agricultural activities; however, the State is enforcing Blue Book standards which the City has adopted into its ordinances. All construction must employ BMP's that the City is to enforce. That is why Cochran has applied to become an LIA and issue its own land disturbing permits. That gives the City more control over the review and implementation of plans for construction projects.

Falcon is currently working on 3 ongoing projects. The Ash St. Park, Peacock Drainage, and Mac Thompson Road.

The council asked what Falcon's recommendation was for the infrastructure upgrades for the industrial park. Falcon's recommendation would be that the developer pay for the upgrades. They will be selling the land to potential industrial developers so that should be used to fund the development. There is already water and sewer there at up to 100,000 gallons per day. More than that, you will need expansion. A clarification is that there is 800 feet old pipe that goes from 8 inch to 6 inch back to 8 inches. This causes a problem because of the distance from the wells. The flow that can currently be provided would only service 2 or 3 small industries. Skip confirmed that it is a well issue and with further development, it would get worse. Without the commitment of large industry, the City would have no means of recouping the cost of the needed expansion except through the billing of water and sewage usage.

6:30 pm

Dinner sponsored by Falcon Design

Friday, March 15

8:00 a.m. to 8:05 a.m. Welcome Carrie Hamilton

8:05 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Jim Washburn, Airport Manager and Adam Holloway, Airport Authority Chairman – Mr. Washburn gave updates on the Airport and explained the pending GDOT grant and project. Any overruns are added to the contract. City and Airport are only responsible for 2.5% each of the original contracted cost. The council will add the vote on the Airport grant proposal to the Saturday work meeting agenda.
Discussion then focused on the expansion of aviation classes through MGSU and the addition of a portable building to be used by the school

for training and scheduling of classes. Purchase and setup of this building will be split between the City, County, and the Airport.

County has committed to pay 50% of the building cost. Asking for the other 50% from the City. The approximate unfinished building cost is \$14,000. The School of Aviation would rent the building at \$2.00 per square foot.

- 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Discussion of Havenwood Gardens I & II and Havenwood Daisy Senior and prospective Havenwood Gardens III – Max Elbe of Lowcountry Housing and Mandy Young of Affordable Equity Partners were unable to attend. No discussion.
- 9:00 a.m.- 9:15 a.m. Break
- 9:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Team building exercise and discussion of Strategic Plan: Ms. Hamilton discussed the revaluation of the Strategic Plan using SMART Goals. Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time based. She recommends a 3-to-5-year plan to incorporate all aspects of the City. Further discussion is needed. The council asked for a separate 1-day work session to develop a new strategic plan. Council asked Ms. Hamilton if she would facilitate this session. She agreed to facilitate this additional session. Location and date must be determined.
- 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Department Heads: goals, operations & personnel.
Police Chief: Jeff Trawick
Police Chief Trawick submitted his 5-year plan for review. He continues to work on replacement of 1/2 vehicles each year.
Continuing to work on renovations for the Police Department.
Always working towards having a fully staffed department with active training ongoing for all officers.
Currently, there are no pending grants.
- Fire Chief: Brock Wilcher
Addition of the new \$1 million ladder truck a real morale booster for the department which will help lower the City ISO rating. That information has been submitted and takes several months to process.
Application for an AFG grant for a mini pumper is pending.
New gear and radios have been ordered using ARPA funds.
Budgeted physicals for all firefighters.
Monthly training meetings.

Requesting the council look at funding 3 more full-time firefighters. 1 for each shift. This will help make the department more effective on Medical calls and provide much needed backup for the county wide ambulance service.

Continuing to look for funding for the much-needed station upgrades. The station needs more room, especially to accommodate an expanded bathroom and sleeping area.

12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Brad Holsinger- the City's Class I wastewater treatment operator- discussion of wastewater treatment plant capacity, compliance and condition.

Brad began by stating he had been with the City since 2018. He is a Class I Wastewater operator and a Class 3 Water operator. He discussed the capacity of the treatment plant. Currently, we are approved for 1 million gallons per day that may sound like a lot, however, it is not. Sewer capacity is the heartbeat of growth in any community. In 2023, average gallons per day was at 567,000 or 56.7%. That is a 100,000-gallon increase from 2022. Line infiltration is a constant issue. You cannot afford to replace all lines to eliminate that issue. You replace/repair sections which take time and is never ending. This is the approach Richard and Willie are using. The longer you wait, the more it will cost. Time is also a huge issue. Nothing moves fast to increase capacity. Start now working towards increased capacity for the treatment plant. By 60% start the design. By 70% start the construction. Life expectancy of sewer equipment is 20 years with good maintenance. The City occasionally has sewer spills caused by infiltration which are reported to EPD.

Be aware that the main pump station needs a complete re-hab. This is a significant expense but there is a grant pending that would cover most of this project. The council needs to make moves now to cover the costs of future required upgrades.

On a lighter side, the City received a Gold Award for the water department last year and will receive 2 awards this year. This is a big deal so congratulations on these awards.

1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Waste Management representative- No one from WM was in attendance. Time was used by the Public Works Director, Willie Farrow, to make his department report.

Waste Water Treatment Plant: Treatment Plant maintenance is very expensive. Our employees are not certified for maintenance, so all maintenance is contacted.

Examples of costs: 1 UV bulb costs \$450 to replace. We use 24 bulbs. Pump basins use 10 pumps. The cheapest pump costs \$3,000 so to re-hab a station it costs \$35,000 to \$45,000. That is why we appreciate the SPLOST funds used to make these purchases. Note that on my 5-year plan, I have requested a mini-excavator to use at the treatment plant for removal of sludge. If we receive the pending CDS Grant, this will not be needed.

Water: We continue to maintain and upgrade all wells and manage water leaks through pipe replacement. A current pipe replacement project is at Lewis/Peacock around the Hospital. Our biggest problem is water loss reported in the annual audit to EPD. As you heard yesterday in conversation with County Commissioner, Mike Davis, we need accountability from the County Fire Department. The average county fire tank fill up is 3,000 gallons 2 or 3 times a week for each year. This creates a significant amount of water loss. We have asked for accountability on this use but so far have received no information. This water loss could affect the future awarding of grants for our water system.

Stormwater: Most of these projects are the replacement of old worn-out pipes. Some work can be completed by our employees and bigger projects must be contracted.

Sidewalks: Council asked specifically about sidewalk replacement projects. Should there be a separate line item for these projects? Currently this is included under the maintenance budget of public works and employees handle most projects. It does require a lot of work. Requests from public works are a dump trailer for road patch work, continued replacement of older zero turn lawnmowers and trucks. Council asked about Cemetery upkeep and the paving of several sections of roads within the cemetery. Mr. Farow said during the summer months, there is an ongoing effort to keep the grass cut using city employees and the Prison detail group. There are options for the road section paving and research needs to be done on the costs associated with this project to be presented to Council for their consideration.

2:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Sheriff Daniel Cape. – discussion of law enforcement cooperation.

Sheriff Cape thanked the Council for the invitation to speak. He stated that the Sheriff's office and the Police Department work well together in

a continued mutual support role. He is constantly working on retention issues due to salary. An issue for all law enforcement. Two upcoming items he is working on are a town hall meeting to address Fentanyl in our community and a 10-week citizens academy to educate our citizens. He is working on this in conjunction with Chief Trawick. He encouraged all City officials to reach out to him if needed.

- 2:30 p.m.-to-3:15 p.m. Rhonda Gilbert – Gilbert and Associates
Mrs. Gilbert gave updates on previous CHIP grants, pending CHIP grant, awarded CDBG grant, and pending CDBG grant. All aspects of the housing grants are moving forward. Special conditions for the CDBG grant have been met so bids for the renovations will begin soon. Additionally, Gilbert and associates will be hosting dinner at 5:30 this evening at the restaurant in this facility.
- 3:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Break
- 3:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Director Alan Yawn: discussion of the Recreation Complex.
Mr. Yawn stated that they were finishing a lighting project funded with grant funds, just finished a playground installation and are putting down mulch for that. The board decided that the department might be top heavy with personnel, so they have made changes and are working with a smaller staff. He has concentrated on payment of bills and better management of funds. Very tight budget but making it work. Future projects include bathhouse facilities, and bleachers. Continuing to work on improvements in the fields and dealing with the drainage coming from Gilmer. The immediate solution is to dig a ditch to divert the water behind one of the fields. He thanked the Council for their continued support.
- 4:00 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. Wayne James, Director of Mid-State Energy Commission (formerly Jointly Owned Natural Gas) – discussion of revenues and grow opportunities, service contracts.
In 1949 Cochran, Hawkinsville, Perry, and Warner Robins formed a consortium to provide gas services to their citizens. Pipeline construction began in 1953 and was completed in 1954. 77 miles of 6-inch-high pressure pipe was laid for \$187,000 and they dug the line with shovels. In 2008 Byron joined. In 2004 a second tap was run from Laurens County which established the Montrose Tap. It allowed gas to be fed from 2 directions to eliminate pressure problems. The original consortium's intent was to supply gas to City customers. However, growth in these areas has caused growth in the system. The cities get the proceeds and the

costs divided. Currently there is work on the gas line to the IDA park. This is a process involving the Railroad. Recent expansion expenses have limited the revenues the cities have received. Mr. James indicated that there should be a distribution of profits at the end of 2024.

This concluded the presentations for the day. Council was given a reminder of dinner hosted by Gilbert and Associates at 5:30 in the resort restaurant.

Saturday, March 16

8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Mayor Pro Tem, Carla Coley opened the day's agenda by asking Councilmember Savant to say a prayer and led all in the Pledge of Allegiance. She then turned the floor over to City Manager, Richard Newbern.

City Manager Richard Newbern discussed the approved Budget calendar for the FY 23/24 budget. This will include funding for the personal benefits, longevity pay, certification pay, and education pay. When the Council votes on the budget on June 11, 2024, you are also recognizing the goals and objectives of the Department Heads and approving their 5-year capital plans.

Councilmembers expressed they would like to consolidate these budget meetings and consider an all-day work session to go over the budget to include input from departments and outside agencies. A reminder that a public hearing is required 1 week before the adoption of the budget. Mr. Newbern then led a discussion with Council concerning options for merit pay, longevity pay, certification pay, and education pay. Council asked Mr. Newbern to put a proposal together for the April Council meeting.

Next Council discussed Mayor's committees and that they would like to re-engage in those. Mayor Pro-Tem, Coley stated she would discuss with the Mayor.

9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Discussion of Code Enforcement: Terry Ware, Code Enforcement Officer.

Mr. Ware stated that he rides through neighborhoods and does a lot of observing. Mostly he can communicate face to face with a property owner or business owner and work out a solution. He follows up with a courtesy letter. The goal is to get people to comply. If they are

communicating with him and trying to correct the violation, he does not send them to court.

Business licensing: With new applications he goes with the fire department to inspect so that he will know if there are any violations and needed corrections. He verifies these items have been corrected prior to the business license being issued.

Demo of dilapidated/vacant properties. Mr. Ware discussed the demo assistance program. It is a lengthy process from start to finish. We currently have multiple contractors that bid on projects. All contractors are given a letter stating the City's asbestos testing policy. The specific requirements for having all locations tested by a certified asbestos contractor prior to work beginning is clearly stated. If positive, then asbestos must be abated by a licensed removal company. No demo work can begin without a letter stating the house is clear or that the asbestos items have been properly removed.

Building inspection was addressed and currently, code enforcement works with the County Building inspector. Code enforcement officer will begin training for building inspection as soon as code enforcement training is completed.

9:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Discussion of Jody Lucas property: This issue goes back about 20 years. Mr. Lucas gave a portion (easement) of land for the City to lay a water line to the Wastewater Treatment plant. In return, he expected the city to build a road and lay a sewer line on his property. The sewer would consist of approximately 2,200 feet of pipe with 5/6 manholes at a cost of \$300,000 to \$400,000. The road would be about the same distance. He would like to propose putting 16 mobile homes in that area however, the zoning is light industrial not residential. There is a reference in the council minutes to "purchase some pipe" but there is no conclusive evidence that the city's action was to build a road or lay a sewer line. This would be a "legal" interpretation of how the minutes read. The current road that is used to go to the dog pound and the treatment plant is along the property line of Mr. Lucas and Mr. Copeland. The easement, shown on a recorded plat, shows only the water line. It was noted that on the plat and deed prior to Mr. Lucas's purchase of the land from Griffin Lumber the utility easement is noted. There was a prior easement before Mr. Lucas purchased the property. Council minutes from 2004 mention acceptance of the plat conveyance of city ownership of the easement. In 2011 the purchase of pipe is in the minutes but does not state conclusively that the city will build a

road and lay a sewer line. The council asked Mr. Elliott, the City Attorney, what is the City's obligation? Mr. Elliott will form an opinion that could be defended in court.

Mr. Newbern discussed with the council the possibility of amending the holiday schedule to move the Christmas holiday from 12-26-24 to 12-24-24 in addition to Christmas Day. If this is the desire of the employees, then the council will need to amend the schedule voted on at the December 2023 meeting. Mr. Newbern will place it on a future council agenda.

Mr. Newbern - Cyber Security: Our third-party consultant, VC3, handles all our IT. We contract with them for unlimited 24/7 computer support. The current contract is \$7,300 and to add cybersecurity training would be an additional \$400. Mr. Newbern approved this addition to our contract. All that have a city email will participate in mandatory training. VC3 also monitors phishing emails.

Mr. Newbern gave an update on the collection and correction of payments for city property taxes. The city is working with GIS and GTS to make sure information is correct and that unpaid taxes are collected. Yearly documentation of paid and tax balance due figures was provided to the council members. The collection rate and collected amounts have changed and reflect the latest payments made.

10:15 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

Discussion of Cemetery presented by Willie Farrow

A total of 42.8 acres is under constant maintenance currently with an additional 7 acres for expansion. The Cemetery Tech position is being filled and the new hire will start in the next 2 weeks. Mapping of the remainder of the cemetery. Will resume once the Tech is trained on the use of the GPR equipment.

10:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.

Business meeting portion of Retreat- items that may need Council. Vote; Called meeting items if necessary; Council discussion.

Present: Mayor Pro-Tem, Carla Coley, Councilmembers Anderson, Ates, Lemmon, Savant, Tedders, City Manager, Newbern, City Attorney, Elliott, and Interim City Clerk, Peche.

Discussion of Roof, Window, Door program criteria. Mr. Elliott made recommendations to liability coverage for contractors at \$100,000 per incident. Bonding could be required, but at a significant cost to contractors which would result in higher bids. One way to get around

bonding is for the City to pay for materials as needed and not pay the contractor for labor until the project is complete and inspected. The homeowner, inspector, and contractor would be required to sign off on the completed work. That does not guarantee that a contractor would not walk off a job, but if they did so, they would not be paid for labor. Another alternative could be to accept a letter of credit from the contractors that works the same way as a bond.

Another item that the Council requested in the application was the approval of Council from their respective districts for each house selected for the program once the locations have been qualified. Councilmember Savant made a motion to approve the Roof, Window, Door program with the recommended changes of contractor insurance coverage of \$100,000 per incident with \$1,000,000 in liability coverage and approval by respective council members for participants. Councilmember Ates made a second. All councilmembers were in favor.

Discussion of the airport runway apron paving project and the consideration of the GDOT contract. Mayor Pro-Tem Coley reiterated what Mr. Washburn had explained on Friday, 3-15-24 to council concerning the negotiated contract amounts and the responsibility of any overages. The 25% match would amount to about \$3,140.45 and would be budgeted in the 24/25 fiscal year. Mr. Elliott stated that the language is sufficient to adopt and will not compel the City to pay additional costs. Councilmember Ates made a motion to approve the GDOT contract for the paving of the airport runway apron as presented with a second from Councilmember Tedders. All councilmembers were in favor.

This concluded the business portion of the retreat.

All council members stated that they felt that this had been a good retreat.

Mayor Pro-Tem Coley asked if there was a motion to adjourn.

11:45 a.m.

Adjourn: Councilmember Ates made a motion to adjourn with a second from Councilmember Savant. All councilmembers were in favor.