

## Memorandum

*To: Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council*

*From: Danielle Honour and Shayne Wood, CDM Smith*

*Date: February 5, 2018*

*Subject: Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council Meeting  
January 30, 2018*

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council (Council) Meeting held on January 30, 2018 at the Southeastern Technical College in Vidalia, GA. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Council Meeting. The meeting began at 10:00 AM and followed the agenda outlined below.

### **1) Welcome and Introductions**

Council Chairman Ed Jeffords opened the meeting, welcomed Council Members and guests, and reviewed the agenda. Chairman Jeffords reminded attendees it is important to continue to perform outreach and educate other groups about the Council's plan. Since this is largely an agricultural region, Chairman Jeffords is working on reaching out to local members of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) in Wayne County to introduce them to the planning process. Chairman Jeffords also encouraged his fellow Council Members to do the same. Chairman Jeffords also stated that he hopes there will be Council re-appointments soon from the appointing authorities.

Chairman Jeffords presented the meeting minutes from the last Council meeting in June 2017 and called for a Motion which was given, followed by a Second, and vote passed for approval of the previous minutes. Chairman Jeffords then turned over the meeting to CDM Smith, the Planning Contractor (PC), who welcomed the Council and outlined the Meeting Agenda and asked for approval. Chairman Jeffords called for a Motion which was given, followed by a Second and vote passed for approval of the agenda. The remainder of the meeting followed the agenda, and the key points and major discussion topics are summarized below.

Chairman Jeffords asked the EPD representative if the regional water planning process has created any change at the State level. EPD responded that there are now continued dedicated funding levels to support regional planning and there have also been rule changes /activities in the legislature that support regional water planning (i.e., EPD rules for drought protection).

### **2) Review of Regional Water Plan Outreach Materials**

The PC began this agenda item by reviewing the fact sheet that was previously distributed to the Council. The fact sheet highlights key elements of the adopted Regional Water Plan and is meant to be used as an outreach item by Council members.

Chairman Jeffords asked if the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission (HOGARC) could distribute the fact sheet on behalf of the Council at their next board meeting. Brett Manning (HOGARC) indicated they would make it part of the package for their February council meeting. Chairman Jeffords also encouraged others on the Council to distribute the fact sheets to key organizations and stakeholders.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked to add a link to the website to the fact sheet where the plan can be accessed.

Response: The PC stated the change would be made and the fact sheet would be re-distributed to the Council.

The PC then previewed the outreach PowerPoint slides that Council Members can use to have Regional Water Plan outreach briefings at up-coming events during the interim period.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked what the interim period was.

Response: The PC noted that the water plan is updated every 5 years and the interim period is the period between the plan updates. Jennifer Welte stated that the next round of plan updates will start in late 2019/early 2020 and will focus on population forecasts and water demand forecasts.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords suggested the Council use these materials to target different groups such as FFA, etc. Industry in the region is already involved. He would like to see more outreach targeting the agricultural community.

Question/Comment: A Council Member (CM) stated that County extension agents should be invited to the meetings including those from Blakely, Dodge, Wheeler and Telfair counties. County agents can also give this presentation and the PC noted that the presentation could be posted to the Council's website if the Council felt that was desired.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that we could improve on outreach to County Commissioners as well.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords suggested that the presentation may be too long and 10 slides would be a more appropriate length depending on who the audience is. The slides should emphasize why this plan is important to the region. He also suggested that the presentation should address available resources (i.e., funding/grant opportunities).

Response: The PC noted that we will work with Council Members to tailor the slides depending on the forum/audience where they will be used. The PC will also print the presentation to a PDF file with talking points included. The slides don't necessarily need to be presented via PowerPoint with a projector. The printouts can be used for verbal briefings to a group. *Update – Following the Council Meeting, the PC prepared an abbreviated presentation which has subsequently been reviewed and approved by Chairman Jeffords.*

### **3) Council Member Survey Results**

The PC briefed the Council on the current efforts underway by the planning contractors and EPD to make recommendations to improve the regional water planning process. As part of this effort, surveys were sent out to Council Members last fall and interviews were conducted with all the Council Chairs. The draft work is currently being compiled into a set of recommendations for EPD and the Council will be briefed once the final results are available. The survey response rate was 36% for a total of 91 responses. The PC reviewed each of the survey questions posed to Council Members and the overall resulting response for each question.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords notes that the Council could have received the survey results sooner, as the survey was completed at the end of the year.

### **4) EPD Seed Grant Opportunity Review and Timelines**

The PC presented on the recent EPD Seed Grant opportunity and the grant proposal that was submitted which includes the Altamaha region. The application was put forth by Dr. Gary Hawkins from the University of Georgia and supports activities in the Altamaha, Suwannee-Satilla and Coastal regions. The PC stated that Dr. Hawkins will also be working with the County extension agents if the grant proposal is accepted. EPD stated that the proposals are currently under review and the decisions regarding the Seed Grants awards should be finalized by the following week.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords recommended that active grant proposals / opportunities also be included in the outreach presentation.

The PC then presented the other grant and funding opportunities. This included a handout which summarized various and multiple opportunities which were compiled by EPD. The PC stated that this will be a standing agenda item at each meeting so that the Council can identify and discuss grant opportunities in the region. The PC will send the slides out to all the Council Members so they will have this information and the resource links to the grant and funding opportunities.

EPD then presented on the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) funding that is available and on the recent projects that were funded in the Altamaha region. Loans of interest to the region include a \$25M loan to the Conservation Fund to acquire 19,577 acres of the Sansavilla property on the Altamaha River. Additionally, a \$20M loan to the Conservation Fund to acquire 11,000 acres in Bryan, Bulloch, Jeff Davis and Appling Counties.

Question/Comment: A CM commented that the tax revenue is lost on that land.

Response: Chairman Jeffords agreed that this is true, but it also helps protect the watershed. Chairman Jeffords noted there is a tradeoff - balancing the protection of the watershed versus offset to revenue lost from tax roll that funds the services that are provided. Eco-tourism is a way to make up some of this lost revenue.

An overview was also provided of the projects in the Altamaha Region that were funded by GEFA under the Clean Water loan/grant program, Drinking Water loan/grant program, and Georgia Fund Loan Program.

Question/Comment: A representative from HOGARC noted that these GEFA funds can at times be used for matches for other grant and funding programs to expand projects and fund additional projects.

### **5) 319(h) Grant Update**

The PC asked Rahn Milligan, Pine Country Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) for an update on the Council's 319(h) project. Mr. Milligan provided an overview of the 319(h) project currently under development in the region which consists of a Watershed Management Plan to address impairments in the Ochwalkee Creek and Oconee River tributaries. Mr. Milligan reviewed recent water quality sampling results that were collected during late 2017 and early 2018 and discussed some of the potential pollutant sources observed during sampling that may be impacting the results. This included an observed deer carcass and bags of viscera during the sampling event in October 2017. Mr. Milligan said they are working on having the draft plan published in June 2018. Mr. Milligan is also doing outreach at a local high school who may be able to continue the testing on a long-term basis.

Question/Comment: A CM noted that it is against Georgia state law to dispose of carcasses this way. Public outreach and education would be helpful in these cases in addition to surveillance equipment at bridge locations where these activities have been observed.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords requested if the PC could add a slide that highlights the 319(h) study results to the outreach presentation.

Question/Comment: A CM asked about feral hogs in the watershed and if they could be a contributing source. A discussion followed on some of the available tools that test and determine the actual source of pollutant by species. It's more sophisticated and expensive testing, but it is available.

### **6) Jaycee Landing Project - Leigh Elkins, Carl Vinson Institute of Government**

Chairman Jeffords resumed the meeting after lunch and asked CM Lindsay Thomas to make some opening remarks on the Jaycee Landing Project. CM Thomas discussed that one of the main access points to the Altamaha River is Jaycee Landing. This area is all under a conservation easement owned by the State and the river drains a large part of Georgia, maybe up to 1/4th of the State of Georgia. A committee was put together to develop recommendations to increase access to the River and using the River to provide outreach and education about the region. CM Thomas introduced Leigh Elkins from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to give an update on the Jaycee Landing Project.

Ms. Elkins provided an overview of the existing Jaycee Landing site – it is used to host several events, including the "Hog Jam" as well as for fishing and boating access. Ms. Elkins then walked through the Jaycee Landing Strategic Vision and Plan that was developed to further advance the improvement of this location. To develop the strategic plan, the committee started with outreach to the community because if the community is involved, they will embrace the project and its use once the project is fully implemented. A lot of outreach was performed including surveys and interviews. Some feedback included improving camp grounds, adding lodging,

limiting the time people can camp, and adding more parking. In the end, the committee created an overall vision for the site as a multi-use facility which includes a nature and history center.

Ms. Elkins noted three major items as the plan moves forward for implementation: (1) Organizational Structure, (2) Operational Structure, and (3) Promote the Vision. It is important to note that industries depend on the river and can co-exist with the site. The health of the upper river supports the river delta for migratory birds. Bird watching generates more revenue than fishing and hunting and can be an important component to eco-tourism in the area.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords stated that as a rural community, eco-tourism is one of the County's hopes to return revenue to the community.

Ms. Elkins closed by saying that an article on the river will be included in the February/March issue of Garden and Gun Magazine and she will share the link.

## **7) EPD Permitting Activity Updates**

EPD provided an update to the Council on some recent permit activity in the region. Some examples include the City of Abbeville (Wilcox County) and Chemours Company (sand mines) in Wayne County. In the City of Wrightsville, the Ohoopsee WPCP in Johnson County moved its discharge from Big Cedar Creek to the Ohoopsee River. The Chemours Company Amelia A&B Mine in Wayne County also got a new industrial wastewater discharge permit.

## **8) Public Comments/Local Elected Official Comments**

CM Thomas requested to make a comment and noted that Braye Boardman from the Savannah River Clean Water Fund recently asked CM Thomas to speak to them. CM Thomas briefed the Council on his comments speaking to the Savannah River Clean Water Fund. There are five major utilities that use the Savannah River for drinking water and the concern is for future water supply (quantity). We can improve quality but not quantity and it all comes back to the watershed and this is where the focus needs to be.

CM Thomas highlighted a current House Bill (HB 332 - Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act) that is currently under consideration. This HB proposes to designate a portion of the tax on outdoor recreational equipment (maybe up to \$40M) to buy critical lands, leasing for protection, etc.

## **9) Next Steps/Wrap Up**

The PC then introduced potential action items for the Council to consider in order to have goals to work towards until the next plan update. These include:

- Identify forums to share and distribute information
- Grant opportunities
- Updates on projects in the region
- Shared Resources - invite speakers from other regions to further understand local issues in adjacent regions

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords would like to bring someone from other councils, including the Coastal and Middle Ocmulgee to hear from their planning folks and councils.

Response: The PC suggested for the next meeting that the PC liaison for the Coastal and Suwannee-Satilla Councils could provide a brief presentation on this topic.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords would also like a DNR board member from the area to attend the next meeting and discuss the land purchases in the region. He also suggested that Brett Manning (HOGARC) provide an overview of regional planning activities at a future meeting.

In closing, Chairman Jeffords suggested the Council meet on a quarterly frequency. The PC asked if we could target a timeframe for the next meeting and the Council agreed that the next meeting should be in May 2018. Chairman Jeffords suggested a boat trip in Wayne County as a potential activity for the Council. It was agreed the Council would explore this option for possibly later in the summer.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:14 PM.

## **10) Meeting Attendance**

Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council members in attendance:

- Ed Jeffords, Rex Bullock, Mark Burns, John Roller, Lindsey Thomas

Georgia EPD Representative in attendance:

- Jennifer Welte

Regional Water Planning Council contractors in attendance:

- Danielle Honour and Shayne Wood (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Brett Manning, Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission
- James Pope, Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission
- Rahn Milligan, Pine Country RC&D
- Brian Mooney, Rayonier Advanced Materials
- Byron Feimster, Georgia Power
- Daniel Carter, Georgia Power
- Furman Peebles, Public
- Leigh Elkins, Carl Vinson Institute