



City Council Budget Retreat Minutes

April 16, 2026
9:00 a.m.

- I. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones.
 1. **Retreat Location: Trilith Guesthouse at 350 Trilith Parkway, Fayetteville, GA 30214**

- II. The following members were present:

The Honorable Anatavia M. Benson
The Honorable Fannie Mae Houser
The Honorable Samuel Perry

The Honorable Linda J. Davis
The Honorable Shanita Nichols

Absent: The Honorable Ulysses J. Smallwood

Also present were City Administrator Tony Phillips, Assistant City Administrator Jamila Criss, Deputy City Attorney Serena Nowell, and City Clerk Deannia Ray.

- III. Welcome & Retreat Overview: City Administrator
- IV. Regular Agenda:

2. Human Resources Department Presentation

Human Resources Director TaLisha Champagne discussed their mission statement and said, it is the mission of the Human Resources department to be progressive, innovative, and customer service driven to effectively support the departments and customers we serve and to deliver HR excellence through high quality services aligned with the city's vision as an employer of choice.

Ms. Champagne reviewed the following functions of the Human Resources Department:

- Benefits Administration
- Payroll Administration
- Classification & Compensation
- Policy & Procedure
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Talent Acquisition
- Employee Engagement
- Talent Management
- Employee Relations

- Training & Development
- Health & Wellness
- Workers' Compensation
- Legal Compliance

Ms. Champagne said the City of Fairburn has a total of 263 budgeted positions and 241 are currently filled, with a turnover rate of 4.8% Total compensation statements will be rolled out this year. She reported the turnover data from January 2026 to March 2026 and said the turnover rate is at 4.8%.

Human Resources Accomplishments:

- Hosted 2nd Annual HR Ignite Professionals Retreat
- Hosted City's 2026 Open Enrollment & Wellness Fair
- Launched Learning Module through Paycom
- Launched Performance Management Module through Paycom

Ms. Champagne discussed Human Resource Initiatives to include:

- HR Operations – Digitizing personnel files for improved efficiency and compliance to include digital onboarding, benefits, and payroll
- Wellness Programs – Men's Health screening campaign focusing on preventative care, offering on-site/virtual screenings and confidential, personalized results. The initiative aims to support male employees with stress management, early detection of risks, and work-life balance
- Financial wellness initiative focusing on managing debt, navigating unexpected expenses, financial literacy, retirement planning, and financial coaching
- Employee Engagement – will host the first annual Men of Impact event highlighting male achievements and their contributions to the city and communities

The Classification and Compensation Study was presented by Gallagher.

3. Finance Department Presentation

Finance Director Kenneth Abidde discussed the Finance Department's mission statement and staff responsibilities regarding the budget, business licenses, property taxes, procurement, accounts payable, and the general ledger. Mr. Phillips discussed the budget process of each department.

Mr. Abidde said the Finance Department completed the annual independent financial audit with no material findings or significant deficiencies, reflecting strong internal controls and accurate financial reporting. They delivered a balanced FY2026 budget on schedule, coordinating submissions across all city departments and

presenting a complete package to city council. They launched implementation of a new BS&A software for the new integrated financial management platform, to improve workflow efficiency and reporting capabilities.

Mr. Abidde discussed major projects and initiatives specifically addressing capital projects and fund balance and reserves policy that has been set for 35%. The software transition will kick off in the fourth quarter of 2026 and will go live fourth quarter of FY2027. The General Fund budget is \$36.7 million, and the year-to-date revenue collected is \$19.7 million, and expenditures are at 36.27%. The projected year-end is at 54% thru nine months. Mr. Phillips discussed HB581 and how it affects our property tax revenues and said they capped it to a 3% increase, so the revenues will be reduced. The millage rate is 8.10 and is the lowest of cities around us. The last time we had a tax property increase was in 2011.

Mr. Abidde discussed reserves and fund balance and said the fund balance is the difference between a government's assets and liabilities, the financial cushion for operations, emergencies, and future needs. Mr. Phillips said we are constantly looking for revenue sources, we have a company that continues to look for grants and funding. Mr. Phillips discussed the Water Authority and discussions with Fayette County.

4. Non-Profit Discussion

Deputy City Attorney Serena Nowell discussed Home Rule powers and said the city falls under the authority of a state statute or under their charter. We are currently working to update our charter. The Home Rule Act does not give cities authority to create entities. Mayor Portis-Jones said we created a non-profit when we received ARPA funds and created utility assistance. Ms. Nowell said charter provisions provide authority to be involved with non-profits. If the city wants to participate in housing, the city could contract thru IGA's and spell out services we want them to provide. They discussed the Old Campbell Courthouse and said they are looking at revenues to move the project along.

Ms. Nowell asked if there were options for public/private partnerships to do a development. Planning and Zoning Director Denise Brookins said as right now, you could only put residential there. Mayor Portis-Jones said the goal is to make it a useful property and because of the age and cost of the repairs, it in our best interest to look at all the options.

5. Parks & Recreation Department Presentation

Parks & Recreation Director Chapin Scott discussed Parks & Recreation's mission statement and said they are to promote physical activity, positive social interaction, and outdoor exploration through leisure activities and recreation programs.

Ms. Scott discussed Recreation facilities to include:

- Fairburn Parks & Recreational Department (Formerly Youth Center)
- Duncan Park & Duncan Park Pool & Splash Pad
- Cora Robinson Park
- Mario B. Avery Park
- Johnson Road Park

Parks & Recreation is essential to how healthy, connected, and foundational to a community's well-being. Ms. Scott discussed the following functions of her department:

- Management of parks services and amenities
- Facilitate youth, young adult, and senior programming
- Youth Athletics for ages 3-14
- Curate special events that bring people together and connect the Fairburn community
- Community outreach focusing on awareness and impact
- Facility Rentals
- Oversee implementation of the Fairburn Parks Master Plan
- Oversee resident wellness programs
- Youth Council
- Youth Enrichment Programs
- Senior Programs
- Fairburn Fall Festival & Parade
- Facilities and Amenities Status
- Park Recommendations

Parks & Recreation highlights were discussed to include:

- Community Giveaways and Holiday Support
- Educational and Enrichment Programs
- Park & Recreation Facility Upgrades
- Youth Sports Excellence
- Planned and Implemented Key Special Events

Facility and amenity updates were discussed.

- Duncan Park baseball fields -dugouts new roofs and painting
- Public Art – baseball mural
- Rehab of current fields
- Addition of Field #5
- Outdoor restroom trailer
- New bleachers

- Pool & Splash Pad – slides exterior painting
- Pavilions – swing structure and swings replaced
- Mario B. Avery Park – LWCF Grant obtained to rehabilitate park to include walking loop, ADA accessibility, outdoor fitness equipment, and dog stations
- Fairburn Parks & Recreation Facility – gymnasium floor replaced, interior painting, exterior sign, ADA entrance and exit doors
- Cora Robinson – community garden

The Parks Master Plan was discussed. They had public input meetings and on-site public engagement along with an online survey. Ms. Scott discussed existing park recommendations to include re-routing vehicular circulation due to the new entrance. Renovation of football complex, basketball courts, and playground area. They would like to develop new multi-purpose field complex with 3 new fields and a restroom building and develop a covered outdoor skate rink and many more ideas were discussed.

Fairburn Fall Festival and Parade – over 17,000 residents and visitors attended the 2025 event. Over fourteen food and beverage vendors were there and fifteen food trucks. There were eighteen community vendors and seven art vendors with over 1,500 parade participants.

Save the Date: 2026 Fairburn Fall Festival & Parade – Saturday, October 3rd.

6. Communications Department Presentation

Communications Director Jacquelyn Howell discussed the departments mission and said they provide clear, timely, and strategic communication that informs residents, strengthens public trust, protects the city’s brand, and elevates the public experience through meaningful engagement, transparent storytelling, and the professional execution of key city events and initiatives. She said the Communications Department was established to centralize, professionalize, and strengthen how the city communicates with residents, stakeholders, businesses, media, and internal teams. The department is responsible for ensuring that information is timely, clear, accurate, consistent, and aligned with the city’s priorities.

This is a newly formed department that was launched in 2025. The core functions are:

- Media relations
- Public relations
- Strategic messaging and reputation management
- Website content management, and digital communications
- Social media oversight and content development

- Community engagement and public awareness campaigns
- Emergency and mass communication support
- Graphic design, branding, and visual identity support
- Event promotion and citywide communications coordination
- Executive speechwriting, messaging, and public-facing materials
- Development of communication policies, procedures, and governance standards

Since its launch in 2025, the department has built critical infrastructure, launched foundational tools, and significantly improved how the city communications internally and externally.

Their key accomplishments include:

- Implemented the city’s mass communication alert system to approve emergency and citywide public notification capabilities
- Moved the city website revamp from planning to completion, improving access to information and user experience
- Developed a comprehensive Communications Policy to establish governance, standards, and accountability
- Created a citywide sponsorship package and sponsorship policy framework to support partnership development and revenue strategy
- Launched *Fairburn in Focus* to strengthen resident storytelling and citywide communication
- Supported promotion and communications for major city initiatives, public announcements, and signature events
- Helped elevate visibility of city progress through stronger messaging, branding, and resident-facing content
- Launched CivicPoints, which will strengthen engagement tracking and provide more accurate event attendance data moving forward

Ms. Howell discussed the concert series and events and said this year’s summer programming is designed to provide a mix of entertainment, community connection, and family-friendly experiences across multiple months. As the department continues to grow, the next phase will focus on strengthening the systems, structure, and strategic initiatives that support citywide communication, public engagement, and high-quality event execution.

7. Planning & Zoning Department Presentation

Planning & Zoning Director Denise Brookins discussed zoning, code enforcement, and building permitting. Administering land use, supporting sustainable growth, and ensuring compliance with adopted ordinances and codes.

The core functions are:

- Land use and zoning
- Concept and final plat review
- Building permits and inspections
- Code enforcement and neighborhood revitalization
- Placemaking

Their major accomplishments include:

- Implementing downtown placemaking initiatives to strengthen identity and encourage redevelopment
- Advanced the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update to support long-term community growth and development
- Facilitated new development through planning, zoning, and development review
- Progressed the impact fee program to support funding for growth-related capital improvements
- Continued blight reduction and redevelopment efforts for vacant and underutilized properties

The Comprehensive Plan was adopted in October 2025 and is our roadmap for intentional growth. It recognizes a fundamental principle; the amenities residents want, like grocery stores, restaurants, retail, become viable when we build enough housing density to support them. The plan brings together land use transportation housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, broadband, and communication priorities into one unified vision. Their key strategies include direct growth to areas with existing infrastructure, concentrate residential development downtown and in nearby neighborhoods, support downtown revitalization and mixed-use development, promote housing diversity and affordability, and create walkable neighborhoods where people live, work, shop, and gather.

Housing is the foundation for everything else residents want. The comp plan calls for diverse housing types, infill housing, missing middle housing (duplex, townhomes), accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and senior-oriented housing, concentrated in downtown and nearby neighborhoods.

Density creates opportunity and when you add 100+ new residents within walking distance of a downtown or neighborhood centers, it creates the critical mass of potential customers that makes a grocery stores, sit-down restaurant, or retail shop economically viable.

Retail follows rooftops, but it also follows income, access, and unmet demand. In Fairburn with 17,000 residents and thousands more within 3–5-mile trade area, expanding the residential base, along with growing household incomes and

capturing retail leakage, is the critical driver that makes grocery stores, restaurants, and retail viable. When that growth is aligned with strategic zoning, infrastructure investment, strong traffic corridors, and well positioned sites it creates the conditions the market and retailers are actively seeking. Ms. Brookins discussed zoning options to include mixed-use zoning along SR 74, downtown-friendly standards, infill and housing diversity tools, flexible neighborhood-scale permissions, and clear, easier to administer codes.

There are 45 site development permits from FY2024 and 110 permits pending from FY2025. Ms. Brookins discussed the major residential projects scheduled for 2026. These developments are subject to impact fees. Ms. Brookins discussed development impact metrics and said there are 1,500 new housing units, 3,000 additional residents, and \$30-40 million retail spending. They discussed vacancy fees and a blight tax for vacant commercial units. Ms. Brookins discussed blighted properties and said addressing blighted and underutilized properties is an important part of redevelopment and neighborhood stabilization. The city's strategy includes code enforcement, redevelopment coordination, and use of tools such as the recently approved blight tax to encourage reinvestment. Fairburn needs to solve infrastructure, traffic, walkability, site readiness, corridor quality, and retail product quality – not just zoning.

V. Adjournment

The retreat ended at 5:00 pm.


Deannia Ray, City Clerk


Hattie Portis-Jones, Mayor