



City Council Budget Retreat Minutes
April 18, 2026
8:30 AM

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 present:

The Honorable Anatavia M. Benson

The Honorable Linda J. Davis

The Honorable Fannie Mae Houser

The Honorable Shanita Nichols

The Honorable Samuel Perry

The Honorable Ulysses J. Smallwood

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

III. Day 2 Recap & Day 3 Preview: City Administrator

IV. Regular Agenda:

2. **Building Operations Department Presentation**

Building Operations Director Dana Smith discussed the overview of Building Operations Department to include Asset Management, Safety and Risk Management, Information Technology, and Capital Projects.

Mr. Smith discussed the following building operation functions:

- Building and Maintenance
- Property Management
- Safety Trainings
- Risk Management
- Information Technology
- Emergency Operations
- Capital Projects
- Logistical Support for City Events

Mr. Smith reviewed the departments accomplishments to include:

- Fire Station 23
- Facility Renovations and Upgrades
- New IT Network Configuration Established
- Created Accident Review Board
- Reduction of Claims

Major projects and initiatives include:

- Public Safety Complex
- Building Upgrades
- Insurance Renewal – aligning insurance renewal with fiscal year
- Server Replacement and Upgrades
- AI Implementation

The City of Fairburn's property and buildings were discussed and Mr. Smith said we own over 500 acres, approximately 200,000 square feet of building space, over 31 buildings. An energy performance audit was done to include energy efficiency and conservation block grant (EECBG), and a new GA Power transmission line was added.

The Public Safety Complex building was discussed. The notice to proceed (NTP) was issued, GDOT is involved and easement discussions are being made. There will be additional cost consideration.

Information Technology is working on the following:

- Network Renovation
- Server Replacement and Expansion
- Backup and Disaster Recovery Planning
- Cybersecurity
- GovAI project
- All buildings connected by Virtual Private Network (VPN) with 98% uptime
- Wi-Fi network remapped
- Critical buildings speeds increased to 1 Gig

Mr. Smith discussed Safety and Risk Management and said we are now self-insured. Our claims have decreased by 22% and our at fault claims decreased by 19%. Our insurance renewal is now aligned with our fiscal year. We offer yearly trainings to include defensive driving, CPR and AED. We have established Certificate of Insurance (COI) requirements and discussed inspections and drills.

A fire occurred in the Old Campbell Courthouse in August 2022. Remediation and abatement was completed. There was discussion regarding repairs and future plans.

3. Strategic Plan Presentation & Discussion (Lead by LeaderGov)

City Administrator Tony Phillips introduced Mr. Bill Stark and Tom Fenbert with LeaderGov.

Mr. Fenbert read the city's vision and mission statements. We want to be a unified city that creates a caring, inclusive, prosperous, and healthy place to live, work, and

play. Our mission is to intentionally listen to the needs of the community and provide quality services that exceed the needs of citizens, businesses, and visitors.

The core values include:

- Integrity
- Positive Attitude
- Compassion and Empathy
- High Standards
- Proactive Leadership
- Effective Communication

Mr. Stark said a citywide survey was undertaken in the early phase of the plan to learn what citizens deemed as priorities for the city moving forward. As Fairburn continues to grow, the residents chose the following as important priorities:

- Enhancing downtown
- More city events to bring people together
- Variety of residential options (single-family houses, townhouses, apartments)
- Affordability of housing
- Walkability
- Improving parks, recreation, and trails
- Redevelopment
- Infrastructure availability

Citizens notated priorities that deserved attention now to include:

- Improve transportation, sidewalks, trails, and road quality
- Growth in economic development
- Quality of life

The Mayor and City Council members provided a list of general areas they wanted to focus on to improve the city in the future:

- Council alignment and leadership
- Downtown revitalization
- Housing support and affordability
- Public safety and risk management
- Economic Development and amenities
- Traffic, trucks, and parking
- Finance and transparency
- Quality of life and community identity

Fairburn's strategic plan was strengthened by direct input from department leaders who understand operations and community needs at ground level. Staff identified priority investment areas and the smart working practices needed to deliver progress with speed, precision, and accountability. These insights focus on

modernizing infrastructure, executing economic growth that expands resident access to amenities, leveraging technology to streamline service, improving mobility while protecting community safety, diversifying revenue beyond taxes, and scaling public engagement that builds trust and participation. Fairburn is ready to transform how it works, measure what matters, innovate daily practices, and deliver results the community can feel.

Fairburn's strategic plan was shaped through direct collaboration among residents, elected officials, partners, and city staff. Four priority pillars emerged consistently – selected for their ability to strengthen economic momentum, expand resident outcomes, improve mobility, and scale infrastructure for future capacity. This plan protects operational excellence in core city services, while channeling focused investment where it will generate the greatest measurable and community-centered impact for Fairburn's future.

Fairburn's strategic plan is designed to be accessible, adaptive, and accountable. City staff will proactively distribute the plan through public channels, including the city website, City Hall, and municipal administrative facilities. Ensuring residents and stakeholders always have visibility into the city's direction, priorities, and progress commitments. The plan is structured to operate as a living framework, reviewed and refined annually based on evolving conditions, community sentiment, policy shifts, population trends, economic growth, and regional infrastructure needs. The mayor and city council will formally evaluate plan updates during annual leadership retreats, while continuing to integrate community input through town halls and structured engagement forms year over year.

To support transparency and execution discipline, departmental leadership will implement ongoing performance tracking, translating strategic goals into measurable outcomes and monitored progress markers. Staff will utilize centralized digital tools and standardized reporting systems to evaluate implementation milestones, measure impact rates, and monitor governance alignment across departments. Strategic progress, outcomes, and investment impact will be reviewed at regular city council meetings and consistently published through public communication channels, reinforcing Fairburn's commitment to shared ownership, operational excellence, and resident-first accountability.

Mayor Portis-Jones asked them to come back and provide a presentation on the May 11th work session so the plan can be submitted for approval at the council meeting afterwards.

4. Economic Development Department Presentation & Downtown Strategy Discussion

Development Authority/Downtown Development Authority Board member Chris Wiley, owner of Oz Pizza, spoke and said he has been in

Fairburn for 20 years. Being in business this long is all about the leadership and how everyone is aligned. You have to have the same vision, or it gets completely derailed, everyone has to follow the plan.

Economic Development Director Sylvia Abernathy discussed their purpose and objectives to include:

- Highlights and accomplishments
- Economic conditions (2025-2026)
- Challenges and opportunities
- Strategic priorities

Ms. Abernathy touched on a few key highlights to include business recruitment and job creation, LCI Gateway Connectivity Plan, SSD & Development Incentives, Downtown revitalization underway and Women's Business Expo. They had 57 women owned businesses attend the expo.

Main Street Coordinator Latonya Amey spoke regarding downtown development and said her responsibility is to help drive downtown revitalization, support economic development, and lead promotional efforts that highlight the heart of our city. This role also works in close alignment with the Economic Development department, with both functions supporting the shared goal of strengthening the local economy and enhancing the vitality of the community. This includes working closely with our business community, planning engaging events, and ensuring that Fairburn remains a welcoming and thriving destination for residents and visitors alike.

As our downtown continues to grow, they welcomed four new businesses into the district:

- Whataburger
- A Step At a Time Learning Center
- Stix
- Get Fruity

We look forward to supporting these entrepreneurs as they establish themselves and contribute to the continued success of downtown Fairburn. Ms. Amey recently attended the New Managers Retreat in Thomasville, Georgia, and gained valuable insight into implementing strategies that strengthen our local downtown, foster collaboration with community partners, and effectively engage with downtown boards to drive meaningful change. She participated in the National Main Street Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which provided the opportunity to tour and learn from other cities that have successfully created cohesive, vibrant spaces for both small businesses and residents.

One particularly impactful experience was visiting the historic Black Wall Street district in Tulsa. Seeing how business owners have rebuilt, honored its legacy, and fostered a renewed sense of vibrancy was both inspiring and instructive. It reinforced the importance of resilience, community investment, and intentional growth—principles we can continue to apply here in Fairburn. Looking ahead, we are preparing to launch a new community newsletter, *The Economic Times*, which will provide regular updates on new businesses, upcoming events, and ongoing projects, ensuring transparency and continued engagement as our city grows. In addition, we are developing the Fairburn Passport, a comprehensive, citywide guide designed to highlight local businesses, parks, and community attractions, offering both residents and visitors a convenient way to explore and engage with all that Fairburn has to offer.

Ms. Abernathy discussed the Economic Development & Main Street accomplishments and discussed the 2025 annual report. An economic snapshot was discussed and said there are 10,118 jobs in Fairburn. Labor participation is at 74% and the median income is \$91,897. Industry profile was discussed and said transportation/warehousing is dominant with 12% growth sector. There is an opportunity for diversification. One of the highlights is the expansion of Duracell. They continue to advance by offering internship programs. Nestle, Purina expanded by \$125 million. We have one million square feet of office space for growth.

Mr. Phillips said our Third Fridays have a purpose behind it. Our vendors and downtown businesses sell out before the event is over. Mayor Portis-Jones said people are purchasing homes in the downtown area because of the concerts. Ms. Abernathy discussed the market segmentation and said they have modern minds, metro fusion, and up and coming families. She discussed the housing overview and said median home is around \$271,800. 64% of the owners are occupied and there is a workforce housing gap.

Sarah Beth Stewart VP of Community Partnerships for Retail Strategies spoke and said every city has the goal to increase tax revenue and job creation, often through new businesses. A combination of these goals increase the quality of life for citizens. The challenges involve communities finding enough times, building a network, the collateral, resources, and the specific experience needed in the retail industry. She said 28% of jobs in the state are supported by the retail industry.

People expect experience to be integrated into the places and spaces where they live, work and play. She discussed adding value to downtown markets by incentive structure advising, anchor institution partnership, and activation and recruitment strategy.

Ms. Abernathy asked questions regarding historic buildings. Ms. Stewart

said she could lean on her team to get more funding information, etc. Looking at your area downtown, it has changed in the last couple of years. We want to see your vision for the downtown area, we can search for grants and fund-raising opportunities

Bill de St. Aubin, Sizemore Group and Town Planner & Development Architect spoke regarding Special Service District (SSD) funding strategies for growth and redevelopment. He said an SSD allows elected officials to provide or enhance services in specific community areas. He discussed buying properties and said his recommendation, get the land first. They are not making any more land, it is a limited resource in our downtown area.

Gateway Livable Community Center (LCI) and Special Service District (SSD) was discussed. The LCI Concept Plan brought community engagement, workshops, and corridor discussions in 2023. In 2024, LCI developed the study with public input. In March 2025, LCI study was finalized and adopted by the city. In January 2026, target SSD implementation and activation efforts were done. The goals were to establish vibrant and distinct downtown and gateway development. Enhance healthy accessible and connectivity, increase housing opportunities and diner opportunities.

Mr. de St. Aubin discussed a gateway strategy for full restaurants and drinking places and said parking decks are expensive, you need parking strategies. He discussed market opportunity and street infrastructure and utilities, and said development does not happen until you discuss infrastructure needs. Model development on geo-thermal structure underground could cut cost on energy bills, etc. Mr. de St. Aubin discussed funding strategy foundations, the next steps, predesign, design, construction, then occupy. Fairburn is positioned for growth, and strategic investment will define outcomes.

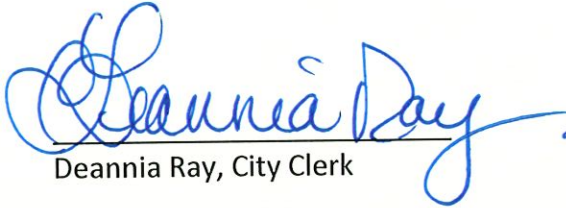
5. Retreat Recap

Mayor Portis-Jones thanked staff for the retreat. She had a vision on what everyone needed to know, and staff went beyond her expectations.

Mr. Phillips thanked Mayor and Council for their support and input during the last three days. There has been a lot of discussion and without your leadership and vision, this is an ongoing dynamic, we will be successful.

V. Adjournment:

The retreat ended at 5:00 p.m.


Deannia Ray, City Clerk


Hattie Portis-Jones, Mayor