



# CITY OF DAHLONEGA

## Strategic Retreat Minutes

April 26, 2024, 8:30 AM

The Public Safety Building Meeting Hall is at 160 North Main Street, Suite 400, Madison, GA 30650.

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In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, those requiring accommodation for Council meetings should notify the City Clerk's Office at least 24 hours prior to the meeting at 706-864-6133.

Vision – Dahlonega will be the most welcoming, thriving, and inspiring community in North Georgia

Mission Statement - Dahlonega, a City of Excellence, will provide quality services through ethical leadership and fiscal stability, in full partnership with the people who choose to live, work, and visit. Through this commitment, we respect and uphold our rural Appalachian setting to honor our thriving community of historical significance, academic excellence, and military renown.

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### PRESENT

Mayor JoAnne Taylor  
Councilmember Roman Gaddis  
Councilmember Johnny Ariemma  
Councilmember Ryan Reagin  
Councilmember Ross Shirley  
Councilmember Lance Bagley  
Councilmember Daniel Brown  
Chief of Police George Albert  
DDA Director Ariel Alexander  
Mak Yair, Executive Assistant  
Water Wastewater Treatment Plant Director John Jarrard  
Public Works Director Mark Buchannan

The Mayor opened the retreat at 9 am. The Mayor read an excerpt from Alice and Wonderland: It is progress when you don't walk in circles. Where do you want to go? Plan it and do the plan?

Allision thanked everyone for attending the retreat.

The council needs to ensure we follow the path.

We will take the plan from this retreat and return to the city to make it happen.

April Howard began the program with an exercise. She asked everyone to find a picture that was important to them and share it with a neighbor. This was an icebreaker.

The group shared photos that showed Dahlonega's future and days in their life with family and friends. This gives a perspective of life and how we bring these thoughts to work.

The outline of the retreat is as follows: The roles and responsibilities of the Council and admin leadership, Strategic Visioning, and the City Charter.

Ground rules were outlined and agreed upon.

## **The roles and responsibilities of the Council and admin leadership**

What inspired you to seek a leadership role, and why were you inspired to do so;

Mayor: Retired and volunteered and was encouraged to run for office. My background could help.

Ryan: He lived in the City for over 20 years and wanted to be part of the rule-making process. He never thought he would be in politics but believed he could do well.

Ross: Having lived in the city since 2022, he wanted to see if he could make a difference. He tried to bring balance to the future.

Johnny: Bring a difference instead of just complaining.

Dan: Public service is in his life, so this extended military life to the community. I want to make Dahlongega a place my family is proud to be part of.

Roman: He is a native of Dahlongega and felt no one was representing these people.

Lance: After living in other areas, he will bring his experience to the community and chart its path.

Allison felt she could identify issues within the city and bring her years of service in government to help the staff.

The hardest thing about this role prompted Carl Vinson to give another class;

What is your role compared to the staff's role? Lance states that we must step back; Johnny finds it hard to step back but sets them on the right path. Allison noted that she would talk to the citizens and let them do the job as needed.

You only have powers as a council member, not as an individual.

Change comes slowly, and you serve the public as a council.

New council members have a lot to learn and how to move forward. Listen, but get them in touch with the right person.

Whether you agree with it or not, voting on an issue is a council decision. It would be best if you supported this decision. If you don't, you undermine the council.

The decision is made for the city, not just a single group or individual. Public servant

We are not individuals. We are a council and must stay together as we make the laws.

We do not always agree, but we are the council. It is our government together.

Function on the council is our gift, but we are a council

We can not solve everyone's problems

Respect matters, and you have chosen to step into the offices and find that you are in the role all day due to the dynamics of the small town in municipalities.

There is a level of liability if you act alone and not as a council. The less you know about day-to-day operations, the better for the council. Then, let the staff handle the business. Set direction and then let them run the ship. The council is policy and direction, while the city manager is implementation and execution.

Politics are in everything !!!

Serving council members step up to the challenge while many people are on the sidelines complaining without helping. If possible, it is essential to redirect these people.

Local political missteps—abuse of power, unethical issues, etc.- are easy to make without realizing they are happening.

Local politics protocol - tell the whole story, focus on the future, be transparent, etc.

Optic of the public service - equal as adults, business, not personal perspectives

Matric was given out to the council. Public values and public choices = everyone brings a perspective to the table. What do you value when you decide on a council? There are four points: Liberty = Equality, Community = Prosperity

Remember, the citizens do not always know what we know, and they cannot always access the information. The council must choose to help the community.

Small house program in 2002. The DDA made money off the program with a housing authority. CHIP grant program.

LIHTC is a rental development. SENIOR Apartments and Blended income into housing. DDA spearheads this program. It is based on income against medium income in your community. Cottage PUD for specialty and seniors

The rental program seems to be in place for the next 20 years.

Their DDA is buying houses for starter homes along with other developers. They are also working on workforce housing. They are working on all dynamics of housing, not just lower developments.

Plans are in place to work with the housing authority and DDA to ensure that housing issues are handled accordingly and that the city is heading in the appropriate direction.

### **Strategic Visioning**

Out of meeting

### **Discussion of sidewalk master plan.**

Streetscape original plan to view for future development.

UNG would work with the city to find a better plan for some of the sidewalk issues and crosswalks in the city

UNG is having students come up with ideas instead of complaints.

We discussed amongst the group ideas to make the downtown a better place to visit and work.

Formalize budget with master sidewalk plan. The staff has an idea for future years: We can use GMRC to assist with this plan through listing sessions.

### **Parks Master Plan**

Out of meeting

### **Existing Park, Future Parks, and level of service**

Out of meeting

### **Annexation Plan**

It is not always a bad idea; it could help establish a tax base, expand, and gain more water customers. Unincorporated area residents will use your services. Keep an eye on the corridors so you can set the plan.

Do not use annexation if you can not handle the services or places in dire straits. Seven annexations are pending and will be discussed after our retreat when we begin an annexation plan.

Future Tower. Wastewater treatment. Capacity staff support. A growth impact on schools

The board of regents is discussing more student housing with UNG, but there will be a dip in enrollment that is expected to return.

### **Capacity Audit**

Guiding principles added to the agenda

Water conservation

Working with the county for a contractual agreement

wastewater accounts

Longevity of wastewater treatment plant - based on state regulations

### **Balancing Growth - Traffic Planning**

Traffic plans are ten years too late, but a community traffic study by GMRC will help us assist with a traffic plan for the city. Is there a need to change one way to two streets but lose parking spaces? Traffic count numbers.

Dahlonge Methodist Church's parking deck has three or four levels. They would contribute money, and we need grant money to assist. With our help with the parking garage, they need to keep green space. Choice parking lot.

The Mayor and Council discussed a company to manage parking for the city.

### **Land Bank**

Public authority to manage and facilitate tax delinquent vacant or dilapidated land redevelopment. Using our ordinance, we aim to redevelop the land under your control with development companies. The authority can assist with code enforcement. The city needs funding for this and an understanding of the community. We would need to make the property a PUD today, which is not the best use. We need to put the DDA in charge.

### **GICH Program**

This is a program that should be revisited.

### **Providing City Services:**

Staffing and growth and recycling.

Recycling is possible with the county or an outside company

The city should not run a dog park and try for a nonprofit organization.

Paving of streets is on a plan and provided for the community, just not when they expected all of the time.

DDA can stay as is with staffing but can go out and find land banks.

SPLOST

Bid for City Hall Controlled CM

I dedicate time to reviewing Dahlonge, alcohol risk liability, and other topics the community is looking into.

Strategic planning days in the coming months.

April 27th

Follow up :

Annexation of other areas is on the books

SDF uncharted waters

April had a true and false game to wake the group up.

## **Ethics - Ethical choices are made by individuals - GA code 45-10-1 Code**

Private promise, exposure, confidential information.

Ethical Reasoning

Obstacles - Doing the right thing even if it is difficult. The pursuit of happiness is difficult in public life.

April engaged in true or false exercises to have the group work independently on the questionnaire and then as a team to see how ethics is a genuine part of government.

Six pillars of character: Trustworthiness, respect, responsibility

The rule of law is essential; this is the gauge for following ethics. The ordinance is our road map, so we must follow it unless we change it. This is just a reminder that as a decision maker, you have more information than the citizen and must make hard decisions, not be led by your opinion. It was very informative and educational for the group. Personal perspectives drive some of the decisions made in all aspects of life.

## **Strategic Priorities update**

Update codes and zoning, review all IGA and MOU, DDA growth and success items, and Plan growth of city and staff with cross-training.

## **Infrastructure**

Assets Management program, road resurfacing, new water sales, water and wastewater plant evaluation, existing sidewalk master plan maps, development of a complete plan, utility rate study, and new city shop location.

Discussion of our road resurfacing plan, which shows roads that are under tremendous stress. This is a reminder that there is only so much money available for roads, and some streets are to be changed, so it is not sensible to resurface before the streets are changed. GDOT and City roads that touch and both need work may get more assistance with money.

Master Plan now and then wastewater plans in 5 years.

A utility rate study shows a rate increase in the next year is needed. We are 24% behind in the rate increase. The mayor believes that inflation is a significant cost issue.

Most people in town are struggling with the cost of their utility bills, but the council did not raise rates as advised in the past, which caused an issue.

Sanitation will be reviewed next year, 2025. This is the most expensive cost at city hall.

The shop moved and allowed the EQ basin area for the wastewater plant.

## **Communication**

Assess the feasibility of partnership with the Chamber of Community calendar.

Update the website

Explore platforms for livestream meetings

## **City Charter**

Council Pay - Peer City pays off the council in other areas to compare. This is something that the group agreed upon.

Size of Council—When was the council comprised of six members at city hall? The council may want to change the charter to allow for a five-member council, not seven members. There may be two districts, with two people in each district and the mayor.

Agenda - think about how to organize the agenda to allow public input and council review. We will remove the line that states the suggested motion. ( not a charter)

Organizational - City Clerk = Change the charter to allow the city clerk to be under the city manager.

HB 1407 Overview - This must be adopted by resolution. This is interpreted by the arbitrator, which is subjected to that person's final decision on frivolous positions. The body at fault bears the cost.

Preparing for HB1407: We need to compile certified data on traffic, fire and EMS, Radio frequencies, Applying PSAP, saving money now, and a Dedicated public safety millage rate—not a millage increase or bondable.

We need radio frequencies, in my opinion, as they are minimal in cost. There is always a shared tac channel for everyone to use.

We seem to be in contention with the County regarding this legislative change. The county will have the upper hand in 2027.

The next step is to create a draft document, city staff refines tasks/dates/responsible parties and then have a future work session.

Service delivery: The council discussed the past SPLOST and reviewed the issues and resolutions between the city and county.

Expansion of City Hall is one project; let Allison send you the breakdown. We voted on the project, and then the IGA was not allowed to be changed. The county should be vague. EQ Basin is one of our projects.

IGA for SPLOST with the County was complex and reviewed by the bond council and Doug Parks.

The city paid the Administrative Fee out of SPLOST and TSPLOST. As City Manager, Allison worked diligently for the City as she had a history of this process. It is her job to make this happen in the background.

The council can use the wording in the future.

The list of items, terminologies, and EQ basin for the next SDS.

Guiding principals were added to the agenda as a footer.

Budget to council in June 2024 and Digest to council in July 2024.