

Planning Retreat Meeting  
July 18, 2025  
Centerville Fire Station, 500  
N. Houston Lake Blvd,  
Centerville, G 31028  
10:30am-5pm

Mayor J. Micheal Evans called the meeting to order at 10:37am

Invocation by Chief Jason Jones

Welcome Extended by Mayor J. Micheal Evans

Present were Mayor J. Micheal Evans, Councilman Robert D. Bird, Jr., Councilman Edward Armijo, City Attorney Rebecca Tydings, City Administrator Krista Bedingfield, City Accountant Carol Harrison, City Clerk Lee Siefert, Municipal Court Clerk Sara McCarthy, Fire Chief Jason Jones, Police Chief Cedric Duncan, Utility Superintendent Chris Coleman

Items identified by bold italic underlined text reflect the initial action items to be pursued by the city.

## **Opening Remarks**

### **Mayor J. Micheal Evans**

Acknowledges this moment as a "historic day" and a new beginning for the City of Centerville. He recognized that this is the first time this new full group of city leaders have met to share their vision and plan for the city's future, from public safety to road repairs.

- While observing that several of us have been with the city for a number of years, noting he and Councilman Armijo have been with the city for 10 years and Councilman Bird with 4years of service.
- New additions in the City Clerk's office, and in the Police and Utility Departments.
- Councilman Armijo initiative: host 5days a year a patriotic flag day, where flags will be mounted to telephone poles at specific times such as Armed Forces Day, Independence Day, Flag Day, Memorial Day and Veterans Day.
- Additional patriotic banners to be flown in parks and public spaces, enhancing visible community pride.
- Recognizes the Police Department for hosting a Robins Air Force Base Armed Forces Symposium.
- Announcing several upcoming meetings with local and regional community leaders to discuss strengthening the city's bond within the community.
- Centerville Elementary among six district schools to receive new STEM program—discussion on increasing city and employee involvement.
- As an incentive he proposes that department heads offer their employees one hour a month (separate from lunch hour) to accomplish this mission.
- Fire Chief Jones and Police Chief Duncan mentioned that their staff are currently involved with both the middle and elementary school career fair events.
- Requesting that each Department Head begin thinking and planning their succession plans and preparation for the future.

- Announces that he made statements and promises during his mayoral campaign that he plans on delivering on.

### **Post 1: Councilman Robert Bird:**

- Main focus: TownCenter, would like to see further continuation towards the development for the area.
- Acquire more real estate for future growth.
- Hire an Economic Development personnel with more specific qualifications.
- Offers his continued support to departments.

### **Post 4: Councilman Edward Armijo:**

- Acknowledges that as the first line of the defense, elected officials often receive citizen's concerns, he offered his appreciation to department heads their effective and timely assistance in resolving those concerns.
- A special mention given to City Administrator Krista Bedingfield and the Utility Department for the amazing response time with the recent water main break; as well as their role in expediting the cleaning and treatment of the Eagle Springs Pond.
- Encourages community outreach and involvement, acknowledging that the police and Fire Departments have different types of experiences which help promote relations with the community and citizens.

## **Round Robin Discussions with Mayor, Council and Department Heads:**

To reflect on the past year (since the 2024 retreat), attendees were asked to share items considered big wins/accomplishments; thoughtful passes which were opportunities the city did not pursue because of circumstances; and opportunities that the city had not planned for but that the city pursued.

### **A. Overview of New and Pending Legislation: Local Taxation & Budgeting**

#### **City Administrator/City Attorney**

- New law coming into effect by 2027, requiring decisions on FLOST levy methodology—population-based vs digest-based.
- Smaller cities (e.g., Centerville, Perry) are consulted by county but final say rests with more populous jurisdictions.
- Population-based levy could be more favorable for Centerville.
- The process mimics that of the SPLOST negotiations—decision-making power mapped to population proportion.
- Anticipation of further amendments to the bill in the next year.
- Discussion on impacts to millage rates: Dependency on SPLOST receipts, budget uncertainty during downturns, and the unpopularity of raising the millage rate during economic downturns.
- The city will have 9-11 months of SPLOST collections prior to fall millage determination (assuming collection starts Nov/Dec).

## **City Accountant**

- City property tax revenue has steadily increased: \$2.26M (2022) → \$2.5M (2023) → projected \$2.8M (2025).
- Growth mainly attributed to digest increases and some rollback in millage rate.
- New federal and state mandates (e.g., overtime tracking and reporting) require further software adaptation.
- Keeping up-to-date with new GASB standards.
- Ongoing need to maintain compliance with changing tax requirements and adapt processes accordingly.
- Provided updated on SPLOST allocations and project completion:
  - Still in the 1st year, with 5 more years remaining to utilize funds.
  - Paid off fire station, fire rescue truck- march 2026.
  - Budgeted command staff truck.
  - \$700,000 may be utilized for additional fire truck instead.
- Discussions were had regarding the status of the Bay Gal expansion noting the following: the project is not permanently on hold, the project should be less now with the help of a potential developer installing sewer, and engineering/environmental test will have to be redone due to the new development changing the environment.

## **B. Legal & Zoning Compliance:**

- Ongoing legal caseload management, annual auditor reporting, and zoning/personnel/utility matters.
- Mobile home regulation: Previous goal of elimination abandoned (would be discriminatory).
- Update zoning map so mobile homes on single parcels outside R3 parks become legal non-conforming uses; no expansion allowed.
- Considering limitation on age of mobile homes for replacements (5/10 years old) in parks to maintain housing aesthetics.
- Affirmation of mobile homes as important affordable housing, especially given local rental shortages.
- State law now mandates all absentee landlords to have a registered agent within the jurisdiction (removes communication bottlenecks).
- Re-codification of City Ordinances: Current Municode provider (now focused on AI/records, unreliable on codification) to be replaced with American Legal Publishing.
- First step: meeting in October; project expected to take ~2 years and possible \$25,000 cost—no urgent need to budget yet.
- City receives 100+ per month Open Records Requests (mostly PD, but all departments impacted). Exploring centralized open records software, with plans for peer benchmarking at fall conference; possible implementation at end of 5-year horizon.
- Potential annexation-Grove Landing (abutting Dunbar)-moratorium is still active, has requested the individual to reach back out once that moratorium ends.

## **C. Software Updates:**

### **City Administrator**

- Maintenance of firewalls and city-wide free Wi-Fi at parks; ongoing priority for cybersecurity.
- Major accounting system in use since 2009 (Accounting Plus, Harris, formerly CSI) showing age—tasks like billing journal generation can take 8-13 hours.
- System must be reprogrammed regularly for legislative/tax law changes (e.g., new W-2 overtime reporting in Jan 2025).
- Need to actively research alternatives with a 2-3 year planning horizon for a new software suite; demo and quote gathering to start now.
- Citywide PC upgrade planned in this fiscal year (about 64 computers, exploring all-in-ones and updated Microsoft Office).
- Discussion on shifting to laptops with docking stations for pandemic resilience—mixed opinions given in-office vs remote work needs.
- Upcoming planned phone system upgrade; voicemail/email connectivity is failing in current system.
- Suggestion for ticketed helpdesk system and monthly reporting to department heads.

### **City Accountant**

- Current software (Accounting Plus) is functional but dated; significant workarounds needed for modern reporting (e.g., ACA, 1099s—outsourced to CPA firm).
- New copier/printer acquisitions in process.

### **Court Clerk**

- Court and probation audits: Full compliance reported (court every 3 years, probation annually).
- Software: State-mandated software integration (to a larger platform) repeatedly delayed by the state (“two years out” for several years); city to monitor and budget as needed when required.
- Probation software outdated, poorly supported. Probation officer tasked with researching viable alternatives and costs for inclusion in 2026 fiscal budget. Noting: That some software vendors won’t serve small courts due to case volume; alternatives under review.

## **D. Staff Recruitment, Retention:**

### **City Administrator**

- Currently working with departments to help fill positions, while still seeking new hires; some departments have experienced some delays, but are moving forward.
- Working towards employee retention.
- Continues to work with department heads to service their needs throughout the year.
- Anticipated need for an additional IT staff in 4-5 years due to city growth and complexity.

## **Legal**

- Discussion of potential future administrative hire shared between the Executive, Legal, and Legislative, as the city demands grow.
- Summer internship possibilities (anticipated for next summer) for special projects and exposure to government operations.
- Personnel Manual under complete update (~8-year cycle).
- Inclusion of optional exit interviews (upon request), verbal format preferred to avoid creating discoverable records.
- Revisiting and updating policies for leave, discipline, and grievance processes.

## **City Accountant**

- Announces new employee has now been with the city 9-10 months, and is working on cola increases.
- Looking at restructure of finance department: separating accounts payable, payroll and accounting (departments 1510 and 1512).
- Anticipation of need for a third accounting staff member in FY2027-2028; to cover growth, vacation coverage, and workload balance.

## **City Clerk**

- Announces department is currently fully staffed, with 2 administrative assistants and 1 supervisor (City Clerk).
- Future plans to implement specialization of building permits and business licenses between staff, with each staff member dedicated to a specific duties, while still being cross-trained for resiliency.
- Goal to create an Assistant City Clerk position within 5 years to support succession planning and coverage.
- City Clerk actively pursuing state-mandated certification (120+ hours training, with additional electives) with goal to complete within a year.
- New Assistant City Clerk (once hired) would be encouraged to begin certification process.

## **Court Clerk/Probation**

- Currently good on staffing, however, there is always potential for growth with court in conjunction with the growth of the police department.
- Department is functioning properly and efficiently; a mention was made regarding the current part-time employee in the Court Clerk's office is able to serve as both assistant court clerk and a certified probation officer.
- All Court and Probation department employees are cross-trained, so that one or more are able to continue workflow.
- A special mentions was made regarding the long tenure of current staff: the part-time employee has 10 years, and retired from the State of Georgia; Probation Officer has 15 years with the city, and Court Clerk Sara McCarthy has 25 years of service.

## **Fire**

- Currently department has 28 budgeted positions: 18 full-time, 10 part-time; with 1 full-time, 3-4 part-time vacancies.
- Observation: Part-time roles harder to fill due to competing schedules, family/work-life balance, and certification requirements.
- Budget needs: Plan to increase reliance on full-time staffing/coverage in future budgets.
- ISO Rating: Current: ISO-3; main point gains available only through increased staffing.

## **Police**

- Currently 20 positions filled of the 24 authorized positions; efforts to fully staff all shifts (some new hires and upcoming transitions to full-time).
- Recruitment: Enhanced visibility, community presence, and active outreach to portray police work as meaningful and rewarding.
- Succession planning: Encouragement of higher-level training and management development among current officers.
- Community engagement: Emphasis on officer involvement in events, schools, and real-time community presence.

## **Public Works/Utility/Street/Stormwater/Recycle/Parks**

- Staffing by department:
  - Water & Sewer: 16 spots, with 2 vacancies, the future plans are to expand to 18 employees.
  - Streets: Currently 2 employees, with 1 vacancy; the future goal is to add three (for sidewalk maintenance) employees.
  - Stormwater: Currently 2 employees, with 1 vacancy, which will be for an additional building inspector.
  - Recycling: 3 part-time; future expansion is possible, but good for now.
  - Parks: Seeking an Event/Marketing Coordinator; with the future goal having one additional full-time staff for routine park/splash pad maintenance.
- CDL training opportunity: City invited to join Warner Robins CDL training through Central Georgia Technical College free of charge

Break for lunch 11:37am

Returned from lunch at 12:14pm

# **City Buildings/Facilities and Equipment needs:**

## **City Administrator**

- Discussion regard the amphitheater timeline, bid process, fund allocations (\$500,000 for amphitheater/sound barrier), and considerations to the overall aesthetic of the design and appropriate sounds barriers to deter citizen complaints.
- Discussions regarding the maintenance and prevention of buildings and the HVAC upgrades. Mayor and Council were informed that we have annual inspections are completed by the city's insurance inspectors that review each building.
- Discussions were had about the potential Gunn Road location, for a new court house.
- It was announced that upcoming discussions between Mayor J. Micheal Evans and Mayor Patrick (Warner Robins) about sewer capacity (Warner Robins is doing an engineering study-how much an addition to the expansion of the current water treatment will be).
- Police and Fire Chiefs, City Administrator, and County- attended a pre-disaster meeting presented by Chief Stone, regarding future FEMA grants; with one grant helping to provide generators (need police, city hall, utility complex, and fire), a potential purchase of a dump truck, and barricades to use for events and other things to help with future needs; applications have to be submitted by Sept.; turn-around time is up in the air currently.
- Utilizing their conference room space for the future person or the community room if future build out.

## **Legal**

- Utilizing home office potentially a new printer.
- With future growth may need to utilize the conference room or build out of the community room to accommodate that need.

## **City Accountant**

- New copier/printer acquisitions in process.

## **City Clerk**

- Main copier and ergonomic office chairs on radar for replacement; not yet budgeted for current year, budget amendment offered as an option for this year's budget.
- Plan to acquire fireproof filing cabinets (one per year) to protect documents, starting this budget cycle.
- Possible interest in purchasing a large-capacity shredder for general office use, but still utilize the certified third-party shredding company for legal compliance.
- Utilizing a vacant office space in 5 years + for Assistant City Clerk.
- Inquiry was made regarding an unused inoperable safe that's currently in storage; this was confirmed that this item was previously purchased by an employee for \$25.00 and will be removed.

## **Fire**

- Discusses current building is still good, will look at finishing out the upstairs for either bedrooms or additional office spaces, potentially next budget yr.
- Old apparatus: 1988 model to be retained as reserve, 1970 model will either be surplus or sold.



- Replaced roof on old fire station (covered by insurance); currently being used once a week by each the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts. The remaining spaces are being used by Fire Department for storage/meeting room. An update was provided regarding the previous one-time mold issue.
- Need to decide the future of the old fire station refurbish or rebuild. A suggestion was made to use the \$700,000 to tear down and build a new, safer facility (meeting room & storage).
- Replace apparatus: Ladder truck currently ~30 years old; Engine 1 is 20 years old, set to be replaced in March/April of 2026 using SPLOST funds, Engine 2 is 40 years old, an requiring continual repairs.
- Rescue 1 is 24 years old and will need to be replaced soon; a new rescue truck (estimated \$300–\$350k) planned as next priority, with combined brush and rescue functions.
- Fire hydrant upgrade program: Only 6–8 hydrants remain to be replaced (Utilities responsibility).
- Training ground updates developers will asphalt (Brian Jones/Robbie Dunbar) and fix the well, they've already graded the drive and added a new gate (provides water to the water tank, west of the church).
- Adding an additional burn room to the burn building located at training facility.

### **Court Clerk**

- Court and probation currently good on facility and equipment; No new equipment required.
- Will continue to utilize shredding schedule for retention needs.

### **Police**

- HVAC Compressor repairs, second unit went out.
- Generator- \$50,000 will operate the whole building. Keeping the department operational, will have a 2yr warranty for generic maintenance.
- Update on gate and bay door repairs/maintenance was provided, everything is functioning properly.
- Razor wire has been installed due to two separate break-ins (one with an armed individual).
- Equipment upgrades: new truck for Lt. and potentially initiating rollout plan to replace current vehicles in the fleet- which purchased in 2020.
- SPLOST funds \$500,000 set aside for facility renovations, plans to build new records room(where current chief's office is) and build out new office spaces for Command Staff (using the parking lot to buildout the whole side). No cost analyzes and specs have procured at this time.
  - Armijo-inquiries about when do the funds have to be used? Answered by City Accountant- SPLOST was just awarded, so we have 5yrs./earning on avg. \$84 to \$200 a mth in interest, as we spend the money the interest decreases, and the Fire engine will be paid in March/April.



## **Public Works/Utility/Street/Recycle/Parks**

- Archdale building (old shop) looking at keeping the center section, but the rest will need to be removed in the next couple of years.
- Potentially will use the undesignated Splost funds, of \$300,000, for repairs to the wet well.
- The lower building located at Water Department/Elberta site, currently being used for probationers will need to be updated.
- Potential build-out of current Water Department located at Elberta in order to move all Water employees to one centralized location; to start planning for that in five years.
- Recycling Center: New office trailer in progress (delivery in 3-4 weeks), built to specifications (with bathroom, lighting, HVAC).
- Planned move to new Recycling Center by March 2026 (could be sooner; aligned with grant deadlines). Transition plan includes minimizing operational downtime (2 weeks anticipated).
- Can crusher (current unit dysfunctional) to be replaced; intent to sell the current unit as salvage.
- SPLOST funds is set to pay for the playground additions which is - lights at the park/amphitheater.
- Discussions regarding Scarborough Park and Miller Court Park- ownership belong to the city and these properties are designated as passive spaces.

## **5 Year Planning-Updates:**

### **City Administrator**

- Defensive driving training- 2 day training.
- Human trafficking training-Helena-Fire/Police/Utility/possibly other depts.: family trafficking is on the rise, Governor's wife Kemp-#1 issue.
- Pre-disaster training.
- Revenue streams/ building fees/community rental fees.
- Request was made to place the Senior Exemption question back on the ballot, however was denied by mayor.
- HB 581 FLOST- may begin around election 2026, effective in 2027/forces the city to reduce millage rate first yr. and then raises it. RT goes into more detail about the FLOST which is based on County and WR and depending what they choose population based or tax digest based method, population would be best for city.
- Future developments-312 homes in Highlands Crossing, 300+ homes in Phase 4 of Emerald Oaks, Houston Lake development (near Collins).
  - Oversight on these projects was laid out for Mayor and Council, informing them that there are several aspects to the stage of a development: from developer to contractor, from contractor to the city; wear several departments would have involvement with the project.
  - Requests were made by Mayor and Council to receive an internal report on all future project updates.

## **IT**

- In 4-5 years, additional IT position, more personnel more equipment, keep data safe and sound, firewall protection/ potential complex svc: City Hall, Police, Fire, and Court.
- Need to upgrade software to a new product, had since 2009. Mayor requests that we start reaching out to companies to find a better product.
- Phone svc will need to be upgraded. Will be getting quotes.
- Cameras are on year three, and we are no longer receiving support and maintenance and support on current that we need.
- Software-All-in-one unit upgrades vs laptop upgrades for department heads as a whole within the city.

## **Legal**

- Personnel manual updates, will be working in conjunction with Elarbee, Thompson, Sapp & Wilson Attorney to complete a review and overhaul of the manual. Initial cost for brand new manuals possibly \$50 per manual.
- Requests for “exit interviews available upon requests” to be added as part of the update within the manual.
- Recodification of ordinances, it’s been 15 years since the last one, a significant part of what the city and its citizen use as guidelines for the laws and regulations within the city limits. Will be working on getting quotes; a potential move from Municode to American Legal Publication. This project could take upwards of 2 years.
- Open records request are increasing and will be looking at streamlining the process with a possible link attachment; and with an Open Records Request software towards the end of the 5 year plan.
- Implementing new requirements with developers, the city will no longer be responsible for retention ponds, and street lights for new developments. Grove Landing will be first; resulting in a new revenue stream since these costs would be reduce or even deleted for the city.
- Requests for an executive session to discuss litigation updates.

## **Street/Sanitation**

- There are 930 street lights that the city currently pays for monthly, with an average monthly cost of \$10,300; this does not include the street lights through GA Power; as mentioned new developments will be responsible for keeping the cost of the street lights on future developments.
- Increased commitment to communication by keeping public informed, well in advance, about all service interruption.
- Ryland has stated that they are unable to meet the increased supply needs of roll-off orders, will look at documenting, so that the roofers and builders are able to furnish their own.

## **City Accountant**

- Potential hire of a third person.
- Updating accounting software.
- Purchase of new monitors, phones, and office equipment etc.
- Update to new federal legislation changes, no taxes on overtime, this year it will be the employees’ responsibility to request at the end of the yr through their W2 tax forms. Subsequent years may become the city’s responsibility.
- GASB’s standards/ and tax digest and an increase.

### **City Clerk**

- Add additional position, Assistant City Clerk, towards the end of the fifth year.
- Projected completion of current Clerk's certification by 2026.
- Additional fire-proof safes and upgraded office equipment, including a new high capacity all-in-one copy machine.

### **Court**

- Training updates/GCIC training compliance.
- Updated or a new court fines portal potential.
- Probation software/ some software companies: the company they're really interested in, unfortunately won't provide service because they are too small of an entity.

### **Fire**

- Future target: Grow to 30 to 35 total staff over the next three to five years.
- Next 5-year goal: Begin ladder truck replacement process aligning with new SPLOST.
- Call volume is steadily increasing, 7% average annual increase over the past 20 years, with a projected 2.65% annual increase over the next 5-10 years.
- Due to overlapping calls for service on the rise, 11% average annual increase over the last 10 years, with a projected 4.5% annual increase over the next 5-10 years.
- ISO currently a 3- highest 1, with potential to move up to a 2, should we increase our staff, update equipment and other reserve apparatus; one benefit would be that homeowner insurance rates could lower.
- There are 8 Fire hydrates in the older part of town that still need to be replaced by WS Department.

### **Police**

- 24 staff positions, 20ft, 2pt, and pick up 2 more back up in next yr budget/ with seven divisions, command staff, patrol division, admin division, investigation division etc. It is about retainability more than anything.
- Training-looking to have an in-house training instructor (possible senior staff becoming certified) for more monthly training.
- Will need to rotate out of service the current patrol fleet.
- Explanation was provide to Mayor and Council the operations of the Crime Stoppers program. Emphases on the donation funds for Crime Stoppers coming from Confiscated Funds.

## **Closing remarks**

### **Mayor J. Micheal Evans**

Would like Mayor and Council to reach out to the surrounding cities and county to discuss plans for a Veterans Day celebration.

Today's meeting was successful and productive, acknowledges he now has a good idea of where we are in each department, everyone provided a well-rounded view, and the Governing Authority is able to see what each department is dealing with.

Offered his appreciation to all for what each have done, and will do, we want to provide help and

guidance to the employees and offer our assistance to the citizens through the assistance of our departments.

Would like to begin offering an Employee Of The Month award, combining smaller departments with larger ones for a more balanced approach: Court, Probation, and Police; Fire Dept (solo); Administration (to include): Legal, Executive, General Government, Finance, and Water Department clerk staff; Water (Elberta staff), Street, Building Inspections and Park staff. Would like to recognize each with a separate plaque, and a possible monetary award. The first awards to be presented for the July-September Quarter (with an October timeframe). Then by next budget year possibly moving it to an annual basis.

Plans on getting with all the school principals in the Centerville area to offer our services, to see how we might best serve the children and community.

Talks about 2026 planning retreat-potential schedule: March 12-13, 9am-5pm (facilitated by Middle Georgia-Laura Mathis) allows us to address any issues and make any changes. Acknowledges it would need to be scheduled in early March, due to budget meetings, which begin in late march (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> week in March).

## **Councilman Bird Post 1**

A high-priority for him will be the TownCenter development, would like to see these properties as more mixed-use (retail/housing units) verses residential only developments. Provided a map of the area (retrieved from Qpublic website) to help illustrate potential properties he would be interested in seeing if these locations could be purchased by the city.

Would like to see the next Economic Development personnel be someone that has experience in real estate/property development, with knowledge in zoning requirements.

Acknowledged everyone's plans and offers his appreciation for presenting those to the governing Authority today.

## **Councilman Armijo Post 4**

Addresses the Police Department, and all departments, regarding the neighborhood watch group, grateful for the positive outcome, he understands there were a lot of emotions, and Chief Duncan was able to resolve the issue.

Good meeting, and the objectives we were looking for was to see what the 5-year plans were for each department, and feels that we currently have right team in place.

Looking forward to a Veterans Day Celebration, and the Patriotic Flag Days.

Mayor J. Micheal Evans adjourned the meeting at 4:50pm.

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Mayor J. Micheal Evans

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Attest by City Clerk Lee Siefert

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Date