



2026 Strategic Planning Retreat
March 13, 2026 | Centerville Fire Department
500 N Houston Lake Blvd, Centerville, GA
31028

Elected Officials Present:

J. Micheal Evans, Mayor
Robert Bird, Councilman, Post 1
Justin Wright, Councilman, Post 2
Velicia Y. Lowe, Councilwoman Post 3
Edward Armijo, Councilman, Post 4

City Staff Present:

Krista Bedingfield, City Administrator
Sara Caldwell, Municipal Court Clerk
Chris Coleman, Utility Superintendent
Cedric Duncan, Police Chief
Carol Harrison, City Accountant
Jason Jones, Fire Chief
Lee Siefert, City Clerk
Rebecca Tydings, City Attorney

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. INVOCATION

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor J. Micheal Evans called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM on March 13, 2026. An invocation was offered by Chief Jason Jones, and attendees participated in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Utility Superintendent Chris Coleman.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

a. LMIG Letter of Understanding, Houston County

Prior to beginning the formal retreat, the Council considered one item of news business: approval of a letter of understanding with Houston County pertaining to the use of LMIG funds. City Attorney Rebecca Tydings presented the letter and described the partnership with Houston County pertaining to the repaving of Carl Vinson Parkway.

Councilman Bird offered a motion to approve the letter as presented, seconded by Councilwoman Lowe. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously with councilmembers Bird, Lowe, and Armijo voting in the affirmative. Councilman Wright was not yet present.

This concluded all New Business, and Mayor J. Micheal Evans invited the Middle Georgia Regional Commission to lead the facilitation of the remainder of the retreat.

V. SETTING THE STAGE

Greg Boike and Alex Smith were welcomed by Mayor J. Micheal Evans as the city's facilitators from the Middle Georgia Regional Commission. Mr. Boike began by providing an overview of the day's agenda and asked for input from those in attendance about what would make the retreat successful. There was consensus around having focused and productive conversations that would allow the city staff to move forward with concrete directions.

Afterwards, each member of the City Council (present at the time) provided some opening remarks about the upcoming topics.

Mayor J. Micheal Evans remarked that this day would be focused on decision-making and planning. He commended staff for handling day-to-day activities well, and highlighted the continued priority of customer service. He noted that the city was in a strong financial position with its SPLOST dollars, and that he wanted to reach definitive "yes" or "no" answers on how to move projects forward.

Councilman Bird discussed his priority of focusing on a Town Center for the City of Centerville. He asked the group to consider in which direction the city wanted to go, as related to the development of this area.

Councilwoman Lowe expressed her desire for a plan of how the city moves forward and shared her excitement for where Centerville is headed.

Councilman Armijo shared his appreciation for the opportunity to meet and identify objectives for the city.

VI. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

a. SPLOST Projects: Community Center Amphitheater, Police Department Renovation, and Timeline

The group started by discussing that a lot of good had been done for the community through the SPLOST program. It has increased the city budget and allowed the city to add services. It was noted that the current 2024 SPLOST has already collected \$1.4M, which is currently ahead of schedule. In addition, \$1M from the 2018 SPLOST remains available to be spent for recreational capital projects. The current 2024 SPLOST is collecting around \$19,450 per month dedicated toward recreation for approximately \$2.4M in recreation funding.

The SPLOST budget for public safety purposes includes, renovation of the law enforcement building, paying down debt service on the fire station, and continuing to replace police and fire vehicles for both departments.

Other funding allocations from SPLOST include:

- Transportation: \$960,000
- Water/Sewer: \$300,000
- Recycling: \$600,000

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- Recreation: \$600,000
- General Capital: \$337,400

City Council appreciated the update and requested that they continue to be kept abreast of monthly SPLOST collection rates. Mrs. Bedingfield indicated that she would add this to her monthly report.

Mrs. Tydings also responded to a question regarding the prioritization of SPLOST projects. The city must publish its SPLOST work annually and must generally follow the established priority list. City Council noted that it would be good to promote these reports on the use of SPLOST projects more deliberately.

To continue the discussion of these projects, Mr. Boike asked the Mayor and Council about the relative prioritization of the amphitheater and community center projects, as both would be considered recreational amenities. Discussion indicated that both projects were important, but that the community center project was likely more popular and may be the better start.

Priorities discussed for the Community Center space included:

- Office Space
- Commercial Kitchen
- Storage Space
- Full Audio/Video Capabilities
- Large Meeting Space (capacity of approximately 500) to replace the Community Room at City Hall
- Availability for use at any time as needed, and can be rented out

Chief Jones would later note that approximately 2,500 square feet would be required for 500 people in a standing-room setup and that approximately 7,500 square feet would be necessary to accommodate 500 people with chairs and tables. The cost of such a facility is unknown, but it was noted that the city could potentially consider a metal building wrapped with brick façade to reduce costs.

The Mayor and Council directed staff to move forward with the procurement of an architect to assist with the design and scope of this building.

Moving on to the discussion about the proposed amphitheater, councilmembers noted that the biggest potential problem was proximity to surrounding neighborhoods. The solution of limiting hours was discussed, but it was noted that education, outreach, and research would all be needed on the impacts. It was also noted that musical events are already held there.

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The suggestion was made for the City Administrator to reach out to other communities to identify what works, what lessons have been learned, and what noise/sound impacts exist. Members of the City Council suggested that public input would be helpful here and possibly for the community center project as well. After this research is done, the City of Centerville will then look to bring in a professional to aid in design.

Moving on to a discussion of the Police Department renovation project, storage was noted as the biggest issue. A new record storage room with a 3-hour burn rating and secure location is particularly needed. The department needs a generator. The site is currently wired for it, just needing to make the purchase.

Chief Duncan discussed a desire to expand about 20 feet outward on the west side of the building. The current Chief's Office would convert to record storage. Additional offices and shower stalls, along with a new Chief's Office, would be added to the new area. The city has approximately \$500,000 budgeted. If needed, the city could utilize a portion of the \$700,000 that was earmarked for debt service of the fire station. This debt was extinguished with SPLOST 2018 proceeds.

The city will need a floor plan and will need to identify the specific design and future needs. City Council expressed interest in ensuring that this expansion was sufficient to last into the future. It was noted that an architect could help with this, too, it was therefore determined, that the procurement of an architect for the community center would be a more general procurement for both projects instead of only one.

Before moving on to the next discussion point, Chief Jones noted that the Fire Department also had SPLOST needs. He noted that approximately \$45,000 in additional funds would be needed for the engine currently being built that will replace the city's 1970 fire engine. He also brought forth a proposal to replace the current rescue vehicle and the current brush truck with a new rescue/pumper vehicle at a cost of \$375,000 - \$400,000. This would replace two vehicles with one single vehicle, saving space at the fire station as well. The Mayor and City Council were receptive to the idea, and Chief Jones stated that he would bring quotes to a future City Council meeting, so that this option could be evaluated.

b. Sewer Expansion Study

Mayor J. Micheal Evans introduced the topic of sewer system expansion by noting that the city currently has limited treatment capacity with the City of Warner Robins. Warner Robins is looking to expand treatment capacity at an estimated cost of \$75M, with \$13.5M coming from Centerville due to its share of current treatment capacity usage. The city's funding sources for this investment would include SPLOST, an adjustment to sewer rates, and the city's Georgia Fund One reserves.

Recognizing that growth is continuing to come to Centerville, this is a need and may result in a slowdown of new development. It was also noted that the City of Centerville should take care to ensure that Warner Robins is not profiting excessively from Centerville customers when agreements are negotiated regarding this increased capacity. At this point, however, no action was necessary to be taken by the City of Centerville.

c. Growth and Development

The city moved on to discuss general trends and desires related to growth and development. Mayor J. Micheal Evans noted that somewhere between 1,000 and 1,100 new homes were headed to Centerville, and several members of council, including Councilman Wright, expressed their concern about ensuring that this growth was well planned and managed.

Mr. Alex Smith invited those in attendance to think about the ideal vision for housing within the City of Centerville. Increasing opportunities for home ownership as opposed to rental units was one priority, especially due to the opportunity for home ownership to generate wealth. It was also noted that the city may want to examine its regulations related to lot size, design, and landscaping, noting that developers may not have the city's best interest at the forefront of their current plans.

The group's conversation shifted to the Town Center area, as it was indicated that the new zoning district had been put into place to guide development, but that the marketing and incentive strategy was out of date, according to Councilman Bird. The City of Centerville has not yet seen developers looking to invest, despite the existing plan.

The group reaffirmed their vision of this area as having a mix of uses, including professional services and office space in addition to housing and retail. When asked to identify a potential catalytic development, the row of houses between Center Park and Centerville Elementary School was highlighted as a prime opportunity.

As the group continued to discuss incentives, the members of City Council debated various structures of public involvement, ranging from a heavily public-sector-influenced approach to a heavily private-sector-influenced approach. While full consensus was not quite reached on this question, several priorities were agreed upon by those in attendance.

- The City of Centerville did not want to be directly in the business of owning, managing, and trying to sell properties.
- However, a model without public incentives for economic development was not going to be successful.

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- Some property owners have inflated views of their current property value and so it may be difficult to spur redevelopment here.
- The city should consider a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to help resolve some of these issues. City Council may want to see examples of effective DDAs in comparable communities to support these efforts.
- The Economic Development Director should be given a clear vision of priorities in order to work with a future DDA. This means revising the job description and also increasing the advertised salary.
- The next Economic Development Director should be able to focus on implementing the vision of the Town Center Master Plan with additional refinement. Developing incentive packages for new development, leveraging redevelopment on blighted property, and helping to direct public investment from the city should be among their priorities.

To conclude the discussion on growth and development, the Mayor and City Council returned to housing. It was discussed that housing was generally available at the higher ends and lower ends, without much housing stock in the mid-price points. The proposed senior housing development on Gunn Road was discussed, but it was noted that it had not received the LIHTC funding requested. Infill housing and townhomes were discussed as some potential priorities for the missing middle of housing stock. Galleria redevelopment was particularly highlighted as an opportunity.

The Mayor and City Council expressed openness to considering a form-based code in the future, particularly with less emphasis on parking minimums for development. The City Council also expressed openness to changing lot size restrictions. In some areas, this may mean increased lot sizes away from the Town Center, while possibly shrinking lot size minimums in other areas.

The city's goal is to provide a mix of housing options. However, the City of Centerville continues to have a number of mobile homes located within the city. It is hoped that the presence of these in the city can be reduced over time.

At this point, the retreat attendees took a break for lunch at 11:38am.

VII. DEPARTMENTAL ACTION ITEMS

Returning from lunch at 12:00pm, each department discussed a few of their specific needs and priorities, especially where the City Council's direction was needed.

a. Utilities

Utility Superintendent Chris Coleman began a discussion on the city's water and sewer fees and rate structure. He began by noting that the water service's tap fees of \$750 result in a loss of \$68 on each one compared to the actual cost. The staff recommendation is to increase these rates. He also noted that the option for a 1.5" tap would be removed due to obsolescence.

Costs of operating the system continue to increase with a 29% increase in costs to run the city's water treatment plants. Houston County has instituted water rate increases tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Mr. Coleman proposes a similar structure chained to the CPI while also instituting tiers where larger users would pay more per gallon over a threshold of 10,000 gallons per month.

The new proposed rates would increase to a base rate for water of \$14 with an additional charge of \$2.70 per 1,000 gallons used up to 10,000 gallons. Sewer rates would match these water rates.

Mr. Coleman noted that the water enterprise fund does make a small amount, but that the city is also seeing impacts from increasing water rates from Houston County water. The system's profits have shrunk from \$10,000 to \$4,000.

The Mayor and City Council quickly reached consensus that tap fees certainly needed to be raised since the city was beginning to lose money on installations. Action on updating these fees would be on an upcoming agenda in April.

It was noted that water/sewer rates had been unchanged since 2010 and that stormwater utility charges were also unchanged at \$4.50 per month since the system was first implemented in 2016. These are proposed to increase to \$6.00 per month.

The Mayor and Council wish to continue discussing rate increases. The City Administrator will send notice of the potential increase in rates and will advertise meeting dates to discuss these issues. The city hopes to institute a start date for new dues of July 1, 2026.

The Utilities Department also reported that its meter change-out program has been working well. To date, 772 meters have been replaced—all of which were billing at the minimum rate. This investment will pay for itself within the next 10 months and has improved the city's water-loss audit results.

b. Fire

City Administrator Krista Bedingfield and Chief Jason Jones began by discussing the city's former fire house and offices at 101 Miller Court. This facility costs \$2500-\$3000 per

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year in upkeep. The department is currently using the bay that was attached to the old house for storage but is not using the house at 101 Miller Court. The scouts do use this house as a meeting location with a small amount of storage.

Chief Jones suggested that the city keep the old house until the new community center was completed, but the group's discussion concluded that it may be more prudent to demolish the old house first, given liability concerns.

Mrs. Bedingfield will work on a bid to demolish the old building and close up the existing façade. The city will also sell the old recycle center site "as is" after the Fire Chief and Utility Superintendent remove anything that may be of value to the city. Once the house at 101 Miller Court is demolished, Chief Jones will take point on an expanded parking lot at that site.

Chief Jones also briefed the Mayor and Council that his Deputy Chief is completing classes to serve as an EMT Instructor. EMT training courses currently cost \$1,800 each, and the city can instead do them in house for free. Chief Jones would like to train all current staff by 12/31/2026 and consider salary increase for EMTs, once certified.

Finally, Chief Jones noted that the City of Centerville will eventually need a new ladder truck too. The current ladder truck is from 1996 and this expense could easily reach \$3M - \$4M in total cost. So, the city may want to start looking ahead at this replacement timeline.

c. Police

Chief Cedric Duncan noted that the group had already discussed building needs previously. He noted that the department will purchase vehicles using up to \$300,000 in SPLOST funds. Currently, one vehicle is wrecked, while another was in the shop, but the department is currently short 3 officers, so any room with the fleet would be exhausted as those positions are filled.

Chief Duncan stated that it would cost around \$215,000 to complete purchases of 2 Explorers, 1 Tahoe and 1 Maverick, none of which include outfitting with equipment. The Police Department's 2026 budget does still have funds remaining and so the Mayor and Council directed the chief to plan on purchasing the Maverick with FY26 general fund dollars.

Looking ahead to FY27 budgeting, Chief Duncan also noted that he may request additional positions in budget for next year.

d. Municipal Court

Municipal Court Clerk, Sara Caldwell reported that the Municipal Court was mainly operating with business as usual. The last court date saw 14 cases with around 30 cases being processed on the last plea date. The workload for the Municipal Court is highly variable, but the Police Department has generally had more charges going to the State Court instead of Municipal Court as of late.

e. City Clerk

City Clerk, Lee Siefert stated that the City Clerk's office is fully staffed. She is nearing her City Clerk's Certification, with projected completion of November 2026. The next key project for her will be Fireproof filing cabinets to remove wooden shelving from the storage area. Chief Duncan noted that the Police Department may have extras to share after renovation.

Mrs. Siefert also discussed wanting to examine building permit fees and business license fees. These have not been adjusted in a very long time, and there may be value in basing some building fees on a flat rate, instead of as a percentage of construction cost.

f. Finance

City Accountant Carol Harrison began by reviewing all of the city's current funds noting that the City of Centerville was in a strong financial position. The city is currently maintaining a fund balance of \$5.7 million in the General Fund, and all departments are under budget on their FY26 expenditures to date.

The city's SPLOST fund has collected \$1M from SPLOST 2018 for Recreation and \$700,000 from SPLOST 2024 in FY26, with \$108,000 spent in FY26. The Water/Sewer, Sanitation, and Stormwater funds are all enterprise funds designed to roughly break even with revenues slightly ahead in the stormwater and sanitation funds but expenses somewhat ahead in the Water budget.

Mrs. Harrison noted that health insurance premiums have increased significantly. The city currently covers 100 percent of insurance premiums for employees and 60 percent for families. The city's cost has increased 30 percent in FY2026, going from approximately \$572,198 in FY25, to \$849,230 in FY26, and an estimate of \$1,033,000 for FY27.

Finally, Mrs. Harrison briefed the Mayor and Council on options for ACH Vendor payment systems through Synovus. Two options exist, a Traditional Method (\$505 per month) and an Accelerated Method (\$750 per month). Under the Accelerated Method, the bank absorbs additional responsibilities and retains additional liability instead of passing it

through to the city. Given the benefits of the Accelerated Method, the Mayor and Council asked that this proposal be brought to City Council.

g. Legal

City Attorney Rebecca Tydings began her presentation by discussing a codification project that had previously been of interest. This would cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000 and last two years. Acknowledging that AI is changing this dynamic, therefore, she suggested that the city wait on this project, as they may be able to do this in another way.

Mrs. Tydings is also working on revisions to the city's Personnel Manual. Her goal is to complete this in FY 2026.

h. City Administrator

City Administrator Krista Bedingfield began by highlighting the good staff relationships which allow successful planning for future. She remarked that staff had received a good list of action items from the retreat and requested that the March 17th Council Work Session be canceled due to no actionable items for discussion. Mayor J. Micheal Evans and Council agree to cancel Work Session meeting and notify media and public timely.

Councilman Bird noted that the city should generally be careful about canceling too many of the secondary meetings throughout the year and suggested that the cancellation announcement for March 17 reference the work done at the city's strategic planning retreat.

Mrs. Bedingfield gave an overview of current staff vacancies. These include 3 Patrol positions in the Police Department, one Utility Worker, the Building Inspector, and Economic Development Director. In discussing additional positions that may be needed, the topic of an Assistant City Accountant was raised. Mrs. Harrison noted that she would think about that in preparation for the FY27 budget cycle.

VIII. MAYOR AND COUNCIL FEEDBACK

To conclude the meeting, Mayor J. Micheal Evans invited each council member to share any concluding thoughts or priorities that had not yet been discussed.

Councilman Bird, Councilman Wright, and Councilwoman Lowe expressed their appreciation for the retreat without additional comment.

Councilman Armijo highlighted a few upcoming opportunities. He requested that the City of Centerville host an event as part of the National Night Out on August 4, 2026, and sited Chief Duncan to look into requirements. He also expressed interest in having a Youth

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Council, which Mrs. Tydings offered to look into this, noting that GMA may be able to help set that up. Finally, he noted that Centerville would host GMA's District 6 Spring Meeting on April 28 from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at City Hall.

Mayor J. Micheal Evans reminded the City Council about an upcoming meeting with the Board of Education on March 24th to discuss growth in Centerville and impacts on the local schools. He reiterated his appreciation that Houston County would assist with the LMIG project on Carl Vinson Parkway. Finally, he asked that City Council to continue to regularly check their emails for important updates.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Council, Councilman Wright offered a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Bird. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor J. Micheal Evans adjourned the meeting at 2:28 PM.

Mayor J. Micheal Evans

Attest by City Clerk Lee Siefert

Date