

# ***City of Sky Valley Planning Retreat***

## **February 23, 2024**

### **Minutes**

The City of Sky Valley held its Planning Retreat on Friday, February 23, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission office located at 1310 West Ridge Road, Gainesville, Georgia 30501.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Hollie Steil called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m. and welcomed all present to Sky Valley's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Planning Retreat.

#### **Members Present**

Hollie Steil, Mayor  
Bill Oliver, Council President  
Tony Allred, Council Member  
Jim Curtis, Council Member  
Bruce Turner, Council Member  
Dan McAfee, Council Member

#### **Staff Present**

Jason Streetman, City Manager  
Sherron Van Camp, Communications  
Karen Fleming, City Clerk  
Jim Pyburn, Building Inspector  
Jerry Shope, Public Works Supervisor  
Cody English, Water Coordinator  
Vaughn Estes, Chief of Police

#### **Others Present**

Rick Barron, EMI; Adam Hazell, GMRC Planning Director; Gina Kessler, GMRC Executive Assistant(preparer of minutes); Patrick Larson, GMRC Economic Development Director1; Faith Bryan, GMRC Information Services Director

#### **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Mayor Steil asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Bill Oliver made the motion and Jim Cutis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

GMRC Planning Director, Adam Hazell, explained that the council can utilize the plan to shape what happens in the future, guide their capital improvements, and coordinate their delivery of services, and that all local governments are required to have a plan if they want to access any funding opportunities from the state.

Currently, Sky Valley is part of a joint plan that includes Rabun County and all its municipalities. Comprehensive plans must be updated every five years. Adam Hazell is in the beginning stages of the update for Rabun County. The updated document should be complete by October 2024. The 2019 Rabun County Joint Comprehensive Plan can be found [here](#) and Mr. Hazell recommended that the council read over the plan while considering things they would like to see moving forward. The council was advised that Sky Valley does have the option to do their own plan.

There will be at least one public meeting in every jurisdiction included in the joint plan and seven to eight meetings in the county. Mayor Steil asked if it is appropriate for the council to attend public meetings. Mr. Hazell advised her that it is encouraged. He advised that it is his meeting to collect information from the community and that the public meetings are a “safe space” for council as they are attending as citizens of the city and not acting in their capacity as elected officials.

An Advisory Committee that must be composed of people that are not elected officials has already been established for Sky Valley. The members of the committee are Lise Rosier and David Spears. Mr. Hazell will provide the council with notes from all the Advisory Committee meetings and encourage them to stay up to date on those.

Mr. Hazell will also be sending out surveys for the community including one just for the local high school students to see what they would like to see in the future of the community. Those results will be shared with the council.

Mr. Hazell asked the Council to keep two main questions in mind:

- I. What do you want to preserve in the face of change?
- II. What are the aspects you would like to see improve?

Three main elements to the comp plan:

- I. Community vision (What do you wish to be like in 20-25 years)
- II. Community development strategy (How should that vision look in terms of development)
- III. Implantation program (A work program identifying critical tasks for moving forward) Includes listing of needs and opportunities to be addressed, as well as strategies to address each.

The information provided in the process will help determine what can be changed or improved, and how best to manage growth. The Comp Plan creates the legal basis for local tools/policies for shaping future growth (via Character area map and definitions)

Work program elements -

- I. Report of accomplishments from last comp plan (status of Work Program items from previous 5 years)
- II. Community work program – List of one-time efforts and actions (outside of normal operating programs) necessary to achieve vision. Includes Year, Action, est. cost, funding source, responsibility.
- III. Any and all priorities identified in the plan must come to fruition in the Implementation chapter. Community cannot be successful with getting the funding sources if it is not in the comp plan.

Adam encouraged the council to attend the public meetings and complete the survey as well as spread the information to the community. This is the council’s opportunity to learn what the interests of the community are.

Things to keep in mind:

- I. Prospects of growth and change; a lot of what effects the future of Sky Valley and Rabun County will come from surrounding counties.
  - i. The Inland Port located in Hall County is in the early stages of development and should be up and running in 2026. The port will result in growth, businesses, housing, industrial parks, etc. that will ultimately expand outside of Hall County.
  - ii. While it is hard to predict the traffic patterns of trucks entering and exiting the port, it is probable that a percentage of that traffic will be flowing through Rabun County.
  - iii. Consider forces out of your control that could bring jobs and growth to Rabun County.
- II. Mix of land uses and how that affects the tax base.
  - i. There is a lot of land in Rabun County that is National Forest and cannot be looked at when considering tax revenue.
  - ii. Do you find a way to maximize tourism or bring in new businesses. How do you want to balance that?
- III. With remote online working, people can do their business wherever they like in a lot of cases.
  - i. Do you have an adequate internet service?
- IV. There is a study showing an uptick in short term tourism.
  - i. A lot more people are taking local trips that are a day or weekend.
  - ii. Do you have the ability for tourism if that is what you want?

City Manager Jason Streetman mentioned refreshing regulations and zoning maps. He stated that the city has put aside funds for those items. Mr. Streetman asked if that should be looked at in the comp plan. Mr. Hazell suggested waiting until the process was complete in case any of those things are identified within the plan. As you consider growth ask what you see happening around you that you do not want to see in Sky Valley or what you would like that the regulations are prohibiting. Are the regulations preventing worse case scenarios or vice versa?

Mr. Hazell re-emphasized that he encourages the council to attend the public meetings, complete the survey and help spread the information to the community.

Adam Hazell can be reached at [ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:ahazell@gmrc.ga.gov) or 770-538-2617.

## GRANTS

GMRC Economic Development Director Patrick Larson informed the council that GMRC can help them with grant application preparation and administrative services associated with grant awards. He provided the council with a Grants-at-a-Glance document that breaks down the eligibility requirements and assistance amount from agencies through whom they may be able to apply for funding through.

The average citizen income of Sky Valley precludes the city from most Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) grant programs. However, there are economic

development set aside programs such as a CDBG-EIP grant that may be available if there were to be a project that generates economic development and create jobs with the condition that 51% of the jobs would be made available to low- or moderate-income residents. There is also a CDBG redevelopment fund to eliminate any slum or blighted areas within city limits. These can be done on an area basis or spot basis. Lastly, there is a limited clientele CDBG for projects such as senior centers, as the people that use that facility are already presumed to be 100% low to moderate income.

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) offers grants that help with things such as, infrastructure, park and recreation, water and sewer, or creating strategic plans to name a few. ARC likes to see competitive applications that show a return on investments in the community by creating jobs, generating tourism dollars, or to create indirect impact such as benefits to other businesses and or residents. The city would be eligible for these grants as they are not based on citizen income.

Council member Jim Curtis was interested in grants that would help with trails or other recreational areas. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) would be an option. Those grants offer up to \$200k with a required 20% match. There is also the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) that offers up to \$500k and requires a 50% match. The city would be eligible for these grants as they are not based on citizen income.

Jim Curtis asked if the contractor could apply for the grant or cover the match requirements. Contractors cannot apply for the grant themselves, but the matching funds can come from any non-federal source. Mr. Larson advised the council that if that were the case, it would be best to have a letter of commitment or MOU. Mr. Larson also informed the council that the match does not have to be only cash; it can be an in-kind match in some situations, such as labor. However, cash is more competitive in the application process.

Jim Curtis asked if the GMRC has the staff that can help with the topography maps and the ability to help show what trails look like and if they have been disturbed by any development. Mr. Larson advised him that GMRC does have that capability and referred him to Faith Bryan for that.

Patrick Larson can be reached at [plarson@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:plarson@gmrc.ga.gov) or 770-538-2611.

#### INFORMATION SERVICES/GIS

GMRC Information Services Director Faith Bryan and GIS Technician Brandon Carlock spoke to the council regarding the field work currently being done to map the city's water system. Mr. Carlock passed around a map showing the progress that had been made. The map can be viewed anytime at <https://arcg.is/1Sq5rb>. Mr. Carlock also thanked Cody English, Jerry Shope, and John Roberts, for their assistance in the process. The map that GMRC is working on can be updated at any time when changes are made.

Mayor Steil asked if all the pressure reducing valves can be labeled on the finished map and Mr. Carlock assured her that they would be. The mayor also asked if residential

meters were shown on the map, and the answer was that only city owned meters are shown on the map.

Council member Jim Curtis asked how common it was to have dual water lines with one line on each side of the street, and Mr. Carlock explained that it is not that common, but probably has a lot to do with the topography of the area.

Faith Bryan asked if the city has begun work on the EPD regulations on lead pipe, and Mr. Streetman advised her that they are in progress and moving forward. Cody English asked if GMRC can assist by adding the meter data collected for EPD to the map and the answer was yes, that data can be added. Service line inventory spreadsheet must be completed and submitted to the EPD by Oct. 16, 2024. City Manager Jason Streetman assured the mayor that they have a plan in place and are working diligently to complete the project on time.

Council member Jim Curtis asked Ms. Bryan about topography maps that may show Knob Drive Trail that connects at Bartram Trail; the property has been sold and is now chained off and he would like to try to find and relocate the trail. Ms. Bryan advised him that GMRC does have a full state topography map that was compiled in 2018, and she can help him with that. Mr. Curtis also asked how to get more accurate GPS coordinates to know whose property they may be crossing. Faith Bryan explained that the GPS system GMRC uses is very accurate; within one decimeter. Ms. Bryan can also provide LIDAR data to show the digital elevation of the area.

Faith Bryan told the council about the Aerial Photography project, and that Rabun County has expressed an interest in the 2025 project.

Faith Bryan can be reached at [fbryan@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:fbryan@gmrc.ga.gov) or 770-538-2614 and Brandon Carlock can be reached at [bcarlock@gmrc.ga.gov](mailto:bcarlock@gmrc.ga.gov) or 770-535-5458.

#### WATER SYSTEM PROJECTS 2024

Cody English presented a PowerPoint; Water System Projects for 2024. The projects would need to be completed over the next couple of years.

The main projects discussed were:

- I. PRV (Pressure Reducing Valves)
  - i. Sky Valley has 17 PRV pits that should be maintained every five years. At this time 75% need maintenance, 10% need new concrete and that they all need to be cleaned with a Hydrovac.
  - ii. It costs approximately \$8000 per site to rebuild, not including the cost of the valve itself.
  - iii. Mayor Steil asked if the city has any parts for repairs available. Jerry Shope advised her that they do have some and can get rebuild kits easily, but the valves can take four to six weeks.
  - iv. Council President Bill Oliver suggested building this need into the Capital Improvement Plan and feels very strongly about budgeting for this because if a PRV fails, it effects the Fire Department.

- v. Mayor Steil suggested a communication to residents advising them to check, replace or add PRV in their homes. Sherron Van Camp recommended putting the information in the newsletter.
- II. New Water Lines
  - i. Mr. English went over the water line replacement locations, and that work will be done by the Public Works Department.
- III. Telemetry
  - i. Telemetry is a tool that helps keep track of how much water is in the tanks without having to physically check the tanks and will send alerts to designated employee's phones.
  - ii. 50% of the city's tanks have it, but it is needed for Sky High, Schonberg, Winding Ridge, and Well 4, 7, 6. The cost is \$10k per site.
  - iii. City Manager Streetman asked out of those tanks, which one would be priority, and Mr. English stated that Schonberg is the priority. Mr. Streetman advised that telemetry could be installed at the Schonberg location through the Enterprise Fund and would not require a council vote. Mr. Street man will work with Mr. English to start that process.
- IV. New Well Sites
  - i. Mr. English is currently working on the well site study for the Lost Valley site, and will be working with Jerry Hood and Rick Barron from EMI on getting permits and on construction once all that information is in.
  - ii. Mayor Steil asked when to expect that to be ready, and Mr. Barron told her in the upcoming weeks, so they need to start on permitting.
  - iii. Jason Streetman asked them what the cost would be, and Mr. Barron advised him that it would be \$250k give or take.
  - iv. Council member Tony Allred asked who permits the site, and the answer was the EPD.
  - v. Council member Jim Curtis asked how much the new well in Lost Valley would increase water capacity, and Jason Streetman told him about about 75% of flow rate but the exact numbers are still being calculated.
- V. Hydrovac
  - i. A Hydrovac is needed to safely remove water from the pits when maintenance or repair is required.
- VI. Well House Maintenance
  - i. Due to rusty pipes and rotten wood several repairs and or replacements should be anticipated.
  - ii. To anticipate pump replacements the city already has pumps for houses 1 and 3.
  - iii. The house would only have to be off-line for about a week when replacing the pumps since they already have the parts.
- VII. Anticipating Growth
  - i. Mr. English went over all the things that need to be or are being done in anticipation of growth.
  - ii. Council President Bill Oliver suggested a comprehensive list with all of things that can factor into the new needs of future development as well as upgrades of the existing system.

## ROAD SYSTEM PROJECTS 2024

Jerry Shope thanked everybody for working together and presented a PowerPoint; Road Projects for 2024.

The main projects discussed were:

- I. Anticipated Paving
  - i. Ridgpole, Buttons Lane, La Quinta Lane, Forest Court, Bayberry Lane, Rescue Lane (from Evergreen out), Still Water Lane and Mockingbird Lane are anticipated to be paved in 2024.
  - ii. These projects will be bid out throughout the year.
  - iii. Council President Bill Oliver noted that Saddle Back Circle at least needs to be patched this year, if not paved.
  - iv. Jason Streetman will look into having the cost of road stripping and stop signs covered through a Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant (LMIG).
  - v. Bill Oliver suggested applying for more than one LMIG as they are awarded on a first come first served basis.
  
- II. Anticipated Culvert Replacement (Top 10 are listed in the PowerPoint below)
  - i. Many of the culverts are in bad shape or dangerous.
  - ii. These culverts can be removed and replaced by the Public Works Department.
  - iii. If culverts and ditches are done correctly it will help with the storm water flow throughout the city.
  
- III. Hydrovac
  - i. The same Hydrovac that can be used for water projects can be used for many road projects as well, including but not limited to culverts, cleaning streets, pressure washing buildings and providing water when cutting asphalt.
  - ii. Jason Streetman suggested that when water is needed, use pond water instead of city water that had already been treated, when possible.
  
- IV. Shoulder Repair (Top 10 are listed in the PowerPoint below)
  - i. Mayor Steil asked if the cost of milling before paving was known. Jerry Shope will discuss the price with the asphalt plant or reach out to Darrin Giles.
  
- V. New Equipment (2024/2025/2026, all listed in the PowerPoint below)
  - i. Jerry Shope discussed the new equipment that would need to be purchased for roads and water/wastewater over the next three years.
  - ii. Zero turn mowers will need to be purchased and Mr. Shope is researching quality and longevity. Mayor Steil asked what the cost of a quality mower is, and Mr. Shope said around \$15,200 for a Hustler, but that he will be looking into other comparable brands.
  - iii. Mayor Steil asked if it would be more cost efficient to contract that service out. There was some discussion within the group as to what may be expected, Mr. Shope is now fully staffed, the city controls the quality of the work if they do it, they know when it needs to be cut and that adding zero turn mowers at this time may be the most cost efficient and timely course of action. Bill Oliver noted that he would like to see some cost comparison of how much it would cost the city to mow versus the cost of a contractor and

mentioned that the cost of maintenance should also be a factor in that comparison. Mr. Oliver asked the council to consider what can be done to increase efficiency by subcontracting as he does not want to cut city services or raise taxes.

- iv. Jason Streetman asked if the same trucks could be used for road projects and water/wastewater projects, or if cross contamination would be a problem. Rick Barron stated the trucks are required to be heavily sanitized.
- v. Council member Jim Curtis asked the cost of a Jetter truck and if it was needed right away. It was also asked if a Hydrovac could do the same thing as the Jetter truck. Mr. Shope explained that a Jetter truck is designed to clear any blockages and maintain the sewer lines by engaging into the lines where the hose on a Hydrovac may not be able to reach the blockage. Mr. Shope also stated that he would like to say a Jetter truck would not be needed right away, but it is something that is best to have when you need it and should be one of the first things purchased.

A copy of the Water and Road System Projects 2024 can be found [here](#).

Mayor Hollie Steil expressed her gratitude for all the City of Sky Valley employees and thanked them for their hard work and dedication.

#### GEFA SEPTIC TO SEWER PROJECT

Rick Barron with EMI presented in the place of Jerry Hood. Mr. Barron expressed how encouraging it was to work with a city that cares so much about its infrastructure. Mr. Barron provided a handout to the council that went over the specifics of the project.

Mr. Barron shared that sufficient economic impact could result in the the city being competitive for an ARC grant to assist in the sewer project, and that GMRC staff could provide more details on that.

Mr. Barron highlighted that Mr. Hood was able to devise a plan that would potentially eliminate the need to create a pond. In discussions with EPD, the agency will now consider a direct discharge into Mud Creek below the golf course dam. If that ruling comes in, the drip field would not be needed. The direct discharge facility would require about three acres of land to access Mud Creek, instead of the 11 acres that would have been needed for a drip field.

Council member Jim Curtis asked if storm water will get into the system, and Rick Barron replied that storm water will get into any sewer system after time. Older systems usually have more problems, and preventive maintenance will help prevent and catch any potential problems beforehand.

Currently, the estimated project cost is \$4.7 million.

Mr. Barron did provide a handout to the council that went over all the specifics of the project. That handout can be found [here](#).



## PLANNING, DESIGN, AND CODE

Building Inspector Jim Pyburn discussed planning, design, and code related matters. The presentation included potential architectural styles, local aspects to build upon, potential greenspace, parking, and designated areas for consideration. Mr. Pyburn also asked the council to consider things such as the zoning map that has not been updated since 2005 and the land use zoning application that needs to be revisited.

Council President Bill Oliver suggested that parking, in the new town center area, be hidden and that architectural examples be incorporated into the update comprehensive plan.

Sky Valley currently has 101 STRs, but only 66 of them are registered. Mr. Pyburn told the council that citations would go out via certified mail, to property owners and door hangers would be placed on the properties. The owners would have until the next scheduled court date to register the rental, or they will be fined. The initial fine for not registering will be \$300 to \$500.

Some discussion was had about nuisance ordinance complaints at rental properties, and further discussion will have to be had about how to cite the owners for that.

It was asked if short-term rentals should be allowed in the new town center area. Mr. Streetman suggested making an ordinance that does not allow the possibility.

A copy of Mr. Pyburn's PowerPoint can be found [here](#).

## CITY MANAGER REPORT

City Manager Jason Streetman reported on several things with purpose of leaving the council thinking points:

- The trash ordinance will need updating.
- The fee ordinance for the annual renewal of the golf cart permits says every five years but should be annual \$25 renewal fee.
- The Future Land Use Map is critical to the city. Do we want to let the development happen, or do we want to make it happen?
- Another water tank should be considered at Alex Mountain.
- Mr. Streetman provided a PowerPoint showing fleet vehicles that will need to be purchased and when. That PowerPoint can be found [here](#).
- Staffing- the budget has already been amended for this year, but the Fy25 and FY26 budgets should include additional employees that will be needed for the Public Works Department, Police Department, Building/Permitting, and Administration. A breakdown of the positions and suggested salaries can be found [here](#).
- The city is taking in about \$900k in property taxes. New changes to tsplost mean that it can be approved by majority of municipalities within a county in agreement, rather than a unanimous vote.
- The city will be bidding out the work on Ridgepole soon.
- The asphalt plant is up and running.
- GMRC to possibly help with creating a trash and water rate.

- Marketing efforts are doing a great job, and the city should consider the possibility of having a Winter Fest.

Mayor Hollie Steil thanked all staff and council members for their time and encouraged all council members to consider running for another term.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Mayor Steil asked for a motion to adjourn. Tony Allred made the motion and Bill Oliver seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:



Hollie Steil, Mayor

Attest:



Karen Fleming, City Clerk