

# DEKALB COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

January 12, 2023

In Person Meeting

Manuel J. Maloof Center

## SUMMARY

I. CALL TO ORDER – 6:06 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Steve Henson, Chairman

Virginia Harris, Vice Chairwoman

Karen Bennett

Claudette Leak

Mary Hinkel

Lance Hammonds

Robert Wittenstein

Susan Neugent

Bobbie Sanford

Jim Grubiak

ABSENT:

Dr. Gerald Austin Sr.

Clara DeLay

Dwight Thomas

Vickie Turner

Alternate John Turner

Ex-Officio Representative Karla Drenner

Ex-Officio Senator Emanuel Jones

STAFF:

Zachary Williams, Chief Operating Officer

Barbara Sanders-Norwood, County Clerk

Lori Brill, JD, Carl Vinson Institute

III. MINUTES – Motion to approve the Minutes of December 1, 2022 with no changes was made and passed unanimously.

IV. INTRODUCTION and PRESENTATION OF GUESTS:

- a. Marcus Robinson – Chief Building Officer – Permitting
- b. Alex M. Joseph – DeKalb Board of Ethics, Chair
- c. David Moskowitz – DeKalb Board of Ethics, Vice Chair
- d. Commissioner Steve Bradshaw – brief remarks

V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- a. Announcement of organizational meeting for a special committee to study the composition of the Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, January 17, 6:30 p.m. by Zoom. The committee consists of:
  - i. Virginia Harris, Chair
  - ii. Jim Grubiak, Vice Chair
  - iii. Clara DeLay
  - iv. Dwight Thomas
  - v. Robert Wittenstein

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. The Chair asked the COO for the Administration’s suggestions regarding amending the Charter in regard to Emergency Procedures.
- b. The Chair reiterated his call for commission members to call or email him with their thoughts about other issues to be reviewed by the Charter Review Commission.
- c. Commission members briefly discussed:
  - i. Possible public hearing in March to be held at Porter Sanford
  - ii. Asking the Secretary of State about election process and possibility of allowing counties flexibility in how county commissioners are elected

VII. REMARKS OF INTERESTED CITIZENS/PUBLIC COMMENT

Steve Binney

VIII. NEXT MEETING DISCUSSION & ADJOURNMENT:

The next meeting will be on Thursday, February 9, in person at the Maloof Auditorium beginning at 6:00 p.m.

**DEKALB COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW**

**MALOOF AUDITORIUM**

**JANUARY 12, 2023**

**MINUTES**

I. **CALL TO ORDER:** 6:06 p.m.

II. **ROLL CALL**

Steve Henson, Chairman  
Virginia Harris  
Mary Hinkel  
Karen Bennett  
Claudette Leak  
Lance Hammonds  
Robert Wittenstein  
Susan Neugent  
Jim Grubiak  
Bobbie Sanford

**ABSENT:**

Dr. Gerald Austin, Sr.  
Clara DeLay  
Dwight Thomas  
Vickie Turner  
John Turner  
Ex-Officio Representative Karla Drenner  
Ex-Officio Senator Emanuel Jones

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:**

Honorable Steve Bradshaw

**STAFF AND CONSULTANTS**

Zachary Williams, Executive Assistant  
Marcus Robinson, Chief Building Official  
Alex Joseph, Chair, DeKalb County Board of Ethics  
David Moskowitz, Vice Chair, DeKalb County Board of Ethics  
Viviane Ernstes, County Attorney  
Lori Brill, Carl Vinson Institute  
David Tanner, Associate Director, Carl Vinson Institute  
Barbara Sanders-Norwood, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners

### **III. MINUTES**

Chairman Henson inquired if there were any changes to the minutes. Hearing none, he then asked for a MOTION. MOTION was made by Commissioner Wittenstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinkel and passed unanimously to approve.

### **IV. INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATIONS OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

Chairman Henson introduced COO Zach Williams and Building Official Marcus Robinson to discuss and update us on the planning department's management and the permitting process. He reminded the Commission that in the CEO's executive office's order, the Commission i to look at how County government can best serve the citizens of the County, including what deficits or things that might need to change to be improved or if things are being run well to be aware and knowledgeable of that.

Mr. Williams: Thank you Mr. Chair for the opportunity to present Marcus Robinson, our Chief Building official, who will talk about our permitting process and what's going on in our one-stop-shop. In his presentation he lays all that out, but first, I wanted to say a couple of things real briefly about him. Mr. Robinson is a public servant, a true public servant, with about 25 years of experience in public service. He's been our Chief Building Official for the past five years and has actually stepped in and managed not only the one-stop-shop but has been acting as kind of an Assistant Director for Planning and Sustainability for the past number of months.

Prior to his joining DeKalb County about five years ago, he had worked in Macon, Bibb County. Prior to that he worked about five years in Broward County down in south Florida. Marcus has been a welcome addition to the team. When the Chair asked if we could have someone provide an overview, I felt Marcus is not only highly qualified but appropriate to really share what's going on out at the new facility at Sams Street.

#### **MARCUS ROBINSON (comments referencing his power point presentation)**

Thank you, Zach, and welcome Commissioners. The purpose of the meeting is to update the Commission on how we are doing and the progress we have made, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak about the department.

A little background on COVID. Our operations right now as you will see haven't stopped. We actually have progressed in many ways. In 2014 there was a report that was made from the Matrix Consulting Group. They were hired to review our permitting process and since then the department has taken into consideration many of the things that were stated in their report. For example, they stated that when people go on our website, they may not find the information they wanted; they also reported that the department had no focus on customer service. They also pointed out a need for a "one-stop shop" for all of DeKalb County permitting. Before the pandemic many of our customers would be in lines and customers had to drop off their applications in person. There was also limited parking at the facility. Customers had to wait on each floor for representatives to meet with them, and in some instances they might have to go across the County.

During the pandemic, customers had to learn a new system to navigate online. Things that they never did before and submit their plans digitally online through a portal that we have. During the pandemic, customers complained they had limited contact with our staff because they were working in a hybrid mode.

Currently, we have changed some things and have pivoted to greater automation. Things are done more electronically, using up-to-date technology and our brick-and-mortar facility changed to include a one stop shop. The one stop shop includes areas such as GIS, planning, zoning, watershed, and transportation. All of those departments are now consolidated in one building, under one roof and on one floor. This makes sure that the permitting experience for our customers is effective, efficient and engaging.

With the ongoing changes, we have seen some improvements and some of those have not been easy but they have been progressive. We are not officially open but we make sure we're courteous to our customers who walk in. We are also available online. We do zoom meetings and team meetings with people. Our department has filled a lot of positions that were vacant and offered competitive salaries. We have created an escalation team, so if things escalate to the top, we have someone to navigate between offices and make sure we deliver things on time.

We continue to make changes in our ePermitting system in a positive way. We also have residential review officers. We updated our permitting system called Hansen. We also updated our ProjectDox, our plan review, making it easier.

One of the new advancements that I am very proud of is Camino. It's an interactive technology and its like a chat. When you go to our website and inquire as to what it cost for a permit, the price will show up. We also have a system called Qminder. It is a very good queue system that allows people to log in in order to get in the queue. People can also wait in their car if they feel uncomfortable being in the presence of multiple people.

The next advancement I am proud of is being able to talk with someone they call. It was essential that we start a call center. That call center is staffed with five full-time call takers that answer phone calls and emails.

We are very involved with commercial business and restaurants. So our department has been very progressive, making sure that we keep up in time and making sure our economy is moving forward within DeKalb County.

**Questions:**

Chairman Henson: Can you tell us about the department's management staffing? Can you tell is there are any vacancies there?

Marcus Robinson: Well, there was a director, Mr. Baker, who had been with us for 15 or 16 years; he retired at the end of the year. Currently, we have been prepared to hold the fort down. We have an interim director. His name is Cedric Hudson and I'm the Chief Building Official. I've also stepped up as the deputy director.

Commissioner Henson: Is there also an Assistant Director missing?

Marcus Robinson: Yes, He retired also. That was a couple of months ago. I am stepping in also as the Interim Assistant Director.

Commissioner Henson: Why would you say those positions aren't filled? Is it an economic barrier or are you just conducting searches?

COO Williams: We don't have any concerns with where we are with our staffing. As Mr. Robinson mentioned, Mr. Baker made the decision to retire and I guess he advised us at least 60 days ago, so we knew well in advance that was going to happen. We will be conducting a search. We had Mr. Hudson step in with over 20 years employment with DeKalb County. We have the utmost confidence in him. Mr. Robinson has been functioning as not only the Chief Building Official but as the Assistant Director behind Mr. Rickey Crockett. We will be in the process of determining what to do long term.

Commissioner Henson: No one is being delayed from being hired for financial reasons, are they?

COO Williams: Mr. Baker left 12 days ago, there are no concerns and there are fortunately no financial concerns. Financially, the county is sitting on two months' fund balance which we have never had. The development area has sufficient funds, so the decision that we make are just in order to be deliberate and ensure that, as we make decisions for staffing, it makes sense for the overall team and the implementation of what we're doing at Sam Street.

Commissioner Neugent: Mr. Robinson, I was interested in your statistics about the performance of inspections, and I think you said something along the order of 36,000 inspections. Was that over a period of a year?

Marcus Robinson: That was a period of a year.

Commissioner Neugent: In 2022?

Marcus Robinson: Honestly, I probably shortened the numbers and my environmental inspectors will be mad at me. Included with 36,000, there should be an additional 12,000. It is a high level of performance.

Commissioner Neugent: So, I was curious you said within 24 hours you performed those. Is that from the period of time that the inspections were requested or from the time they were scheduled?

Marcus Robinson: From the time they were scheduled.

Commissioner Sanford: Mr. Robinson. I personally experienced quite a nightmare during the pandemic merely trying to have a property inspected for electrical service. It was quite exasperating. There were numbers to call and no one would ever call you back. I am very pleased to see that I have not had to do that recently. I also did not realize that the department had moved. I think I went to three different locations. In addition, in talking with small businesses, I hear that they have difficulty maneuvering in and through the system. What are we doing to make it inviting to have new businesses come to DeKalb County?

Marcus Robinson: The on-line permitting system that we have, many customers are using it. Also the new Call Center, using the online portal, submitting projects to ProjectDox, and staffing being

able to meet all demands. We meet with the business and bring in the engineers, fire marshal, and architects at the same time. We bring these before they submit, which gives them an opportunity to explain what they are doing and get answers on point at that time.

Commissioner Sanford: What is the average amount of time for a small business wanting to set up shop in DeKalb County from the beginning of the application to completion?

Marcus Robinson: As far as submitting the application, we have a five-day turnaround. For review of that application and review of that particular site for a business, it's a ten day turnaround. If there is not an issue with the plans you can look for a 15-20 day turnaround.

Commissioner Wittenstein: It has been nine year since the last study. Do you have plans to do a follow-up to mark your progress and set new goals? I noticed that you collected \$14 million in fees are you a profit center? Is that where your funding comes from? Are you responsible for Code Enforcement?

Marcus Robinson: Regarding a new study, I don't have any information. We are still finishing up on this study. As to the fees, we're an enterprise department. Many of the fees we collect actually pay our bills. This income is monitored quarterly by an oversight committee of development services staff. Code Enforcement – I have a small wheel. We have two code compliance officer that we deal with mainly with land development.

Commissioner Leak: I am going to date myself. Many years ago, about the time we purchased the Hansen application, there was a BOC ordinance that basically said if you have a code violation, code enforcement violation, that you would not be able to get a permit or a business license. In the study, are you able to capture that information, do anything with it, is that still a valid part of what you would do?

Marcus Robinson: Yes we do. We make sure that we tally those violations. The code compliance department uses the same system that we use as far as tracking the violations. Our department is able to track that through business licenses and permitting.

Commissioner Leak: Have you built In a process to deal with those scenarios where that might be the case to suspend or not issue a business license or a permit?

Marcus Robinson: Yes, we have information that we keep and tally in order to issue a cease and desist for businesses and not issuing licenses to repeat violators.

Commissioner Leak: In looking at the performance measures, is this information and data posted on your website?

Marcus Robinson: I'm not quite sure, if not, I think it is a great idea. I will definitely make sure this is on our website.

Commissioner Hammonds: Are you part of the Planning Department, Is your group part of the Planning Department, do you deal with just permits or the zoning process? How do you navigate that process to make it cleaner all the way through?

Marcus Robinson: As we go down the road with the current plan, the overall comp plan for the county as far as the zoning, there'll be more information; you will be able to get the more detailed information you need.

Commissioner Hammonds: The perception is that it is difficult to do business In DeKalb County. I'm sure you have heard the same thing. That is something to work towards. I am just wanting us to think that somewhere down the line that people do want to come to DeKalb. They do want to come to District 4 because we have the land to develop.

Marcus Robinson: We are definitely taking into account what you're saying for continuous improvement. We can always get better to change the perception. It takes time to change perception but we are definitely willing to step in and fight the good fight.

Commissioner Grubiak: You mentioned the compliance department and enforcement department. What is the difference between the two?

COO Williams: Mr. Hardy is the Director of Code Compliance and previously it was known as Code Enforcement. They have no real enforcement authority, they have no authority to cite. The enforcement authority lies with the courts.

Commissioner Grubiak: May I request a copy of the presentation today. Also, I would like a copy of an org chart which reflects the offices that you were describing today and how they relate to one another.

Marcus Robinson: We will share that with you.

Commissioner Bennett: Who would I need to speak to regarding signage about a zoning meeting? Many times, those signs are in places that are too dangerous to stop or pull over to the side. Citizens are unable to read the signs. Is there something to be addressed here?

Marcus Robinson: That can't be addressed here but the key persons are Brandon White, the zoning manager, and Rachel Bragg the zoning administrator.

Representative Bennett: The size 14 by 12 or 12 by 12 is certainly not sufficient.

#### **COMMISSIONER STEVE BRADSHAW**

Good evening, so it's interesting being on this side of the stage. I'll keep this short. The work you all are engaged in is very critical, so I want to personally thank each of you for choosing the path of public service. Carry on.

Chairman Henson:

At this time, we have the Chair and Vice chair of the Ethics Board. As you know there was a lawsuit that said that the Ethics Board could not be comprised of appointees who were from nongovernmental elected officials. The Ethics Board was struck down and it had to be reconstituted. The law had to be passed to change the appointment of the board. The board is now operating; they had to hire an ethics



administrator and a new ethics officer. The Ethics Officer is commended basically by the board or picked, but they have to be approved by Commissioners and the CEO.

**ALEX JOSEPH, Chair, DeKalb Board of Ethics:**

I'm the Chair of the DeKalb County Board of Ethics. It is very interesting to go after a building department because much of what the Ethics Board does is ephemeral; its things you can't touch. It's about processes.

My first point is that we no longer want to be perceived as prosecutorial. In hiring our ethics officer, one of the things that we emphasized in our search was that she would have open office hours and she would be accessible. We want employees, elected officials, even the leaders or the lawyers of DeKalb County to use us as a resource because we hope to have very few cases on our docket. People should not be afraid of approaching the Ethics Board or think that if they ask a question, it will inevitably turn into a complaint or a lawsuit. Our role is one of education – training of employees, public officials, and the public.

The Ethics Board is independent, but that does not mean there is not a relationship. This is the only ethics board that I am aware of in Georgia that exists under this statutory scheme. By keeping it statutory, resting with the General Assembly, it's hard for us to update our ethics code. It's hard to remain non-political. It's not just staying out of DeKalb politics, it is for staying out of statewide politics. I do think that relationship should be examined as far as whether or not there's a way to bring the Ethics Board back under the umbrella of DeKalb County. It would be DeKalb County taking control once again. Watch dog nature. I think that we should have our own Ethics Board.

The Board of Ethics has staff that includes by legislation an Ethics Officer and an Ethics Administrator. We currently have a Deputy Ethics Officer position that I'm moving to terminate. The position is not in the ethics code.

**DAVID MOSKOWITZ, Vice-Chair, DeKalb Board of Ethics:**

The first thing is that this law is extremely unique. The second thing is that it is extremely important because of the uniqueness that education of this law occur; it is imperative in DeKalb County because it affects all the employees. They have to know what this law says in order for this law to exist. We are seeing some stuff that we really should not see because the employees are not educated to know what comes under our jurisdiction and what doesn't. I don't want to come into a situation where all cases are dismissed because we don't have jurisdiction over it.

The last thing I would like to discuss and I have spoken with Ms. Hinkel about this is the appointment procedure. This is legislative. In the composite of the Board, I believe we have three appointments from the State Senate, three from the House delegation of DeKalb. There are two alternates. The Clerk and Tax Commissioner picks the seventh. I don't know what the vetting process is because I was not involved in it.

Chairman Henson: First of all, there was a comment that possibly in the structure that the ethics commission was not part of the DeKalb County Government. This is up here tonight because you are contained within the County Charter. Other elements of DeKalb County government may not admit that fact, but that is true. Second, you mentioned the hiring and approval of your officer by the Commission

and CEO. Did you receive any pushback before you hired somebody or input from any of those agencies before? Do you believe that's improper that they have since they pay for the Board and you are part of DeKalb County Government how do you feel about that input? This commission has no legal authority, but if you see something in this section, please get with me, Ms. Harris or Ms. Hinkel and we will meet with you individually.

Alex Joseph: Nothing improper happened before hiring her and nothing happened improper after hiring her. There was no input whatsoever regarding the candidate. They are viewing us as too independent. It took a long time to get the approval – several months. We got wonderful reviews after we hired her.

Commissioner Hinkel: I want to point out that as you look at any suggestions for this section of the charter, that you also look at what was written for the independent auditor. Because in that case, they have a time remedy of 30 days; if nothing happens in 30 days, then the audit oversight committee makes the selection from the nominated names.

Also, in terms of the appointment of people to the Board, the independent auditors have really specific professional requirements. I don't have it in front of me, but I think they all have to have some kind of performance audit experience or accounting experience. I kind of feel like we have a Cadillac ethics code. Paul Wolpe, the Chair of the Emory Center for Ethics said we have a great code. I've watched your meetings on Zoom and you all are doing a wonderful job. The focus on education is exactly what is needed.

Alex Joseph: I agree we have a strong ethics code and that is why we are focusing on rules because if an ethics code is inaccessible, it doesn't work. We have a new website which I am very proud of and we are hoping our ethics officer can actually make some videos to explain the ethics code and they can serve as a really strong resource.

Commissioner Leak: I would like to commend the Board on having cleared out that backlog after the Supreme Court's decision and that it did not take two years to get it done. One of the things that the previous officer did was – there was a culture survey conducted by the University of North Georgia. I had an opportunity to look at that and it was very interesting. Is that something that needs to be done again.

Alex Joseph: We have talked already about surveys and how we're going to be getting feedback to figure out if we are effective. We are building up a strong training regime, but we're obviously looking to make it stronger with office hours, with a better hotline, with more website resources. I agree with you at some point a survey has to be done. I don't think we're quite ready to unveil it to the people to get proper answers.

Chairman Henson: Thank you so much. I wanted to ask our County Attorney to comment on your relationship with the Ethics Board and any comments that you evidently had something on your mind as well.

County Attorney Ernstes: We have a very good relationship with the Ethics Board. We have a very good relationship with the Chair. I did want to point out one thing as to the appointment process so that you are aware of the delay and you can blame me. Obviously, there is some delay when you have a Board of Commissioners that meets twice a month and they have committee meetings. 30 days is an awfully ambitious timeline to ensure that you have the correction appointee for such important positions. The

Board of Commissioner's hesitancy or at least my hesitancy during the course of this appointment process actually relates to a case that was under consideration by the Ethics Board against a sitting Commissioner, two sitting Commissioners dealing with the previous Board and the previous ethics officer's opinion that those commissioners should have recused themselves from voting on a particular action because they had civil lawsuits filed against them. My concern was that I did not want to have my Board of Commissioners vote to appoint an ethics officer and then immediately be the subject of another ethics violation or complaint.

Commissioner Hinkel: I thought the ethics officer doesn't make the decisions on cases. It is the Board of Ethics.

County Attorney Ernstes: Yes.

Commissioner Hinkel: So, the appointment of an ethics officer – the vote by a member of the Board of Commissioners, I don't see how that puts them in harm's way.

County Attorney Ernstes: The ethics officers presents the cases and decides which cases to present or to prosecute. She is not necessarily the lawyer for the complainant but she does present cases to the Ethics Board.

Commissioner Hinkel: True. But it's still the Board of Ethics that makes any final decision.

County Attorney Ernstes: Correct

Commissioner Hinkel: They decide too on whether there is a preponderance of evidence before there is a final hearing. Again, from my perception there wasn't an issue.

Alex Joseph: One thing about our rules is that is that we cannot recuse ourselves unless the board counsel agrees. She's the one that gets to decide if we can recuse ourselves if there's an actual conflict.

Commissioner Leak: I remember when the ethics bill passed with the changes there was a lot of talk and discussion about the ethics officer not being fair, having too much power, and being judge, jury and executioner all in one. I think it was 2020. One of the things that they put in there was the ethics administrator position to prevent this. My understanding was that was the reason that the administrator position was added to the language of the bill, is that correct?

Alex Joseph: I do not know why administrator was added.

Commissioner Leak: It was added as a stopgap to basically take the whole thing out of the hands of the ethics officer and then the administrator would be an impartial body. You just deal with everything under your guidelines and your rules.

## **V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Announcement of organizational meeting for a special committee to study the composition of the Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, January 17, 6:30 p.m. by Zoom. The committee consists of:

Virginia Harris, Chair  
Jim Grubiak, Vice Chair  
Clara DeLay  
Dwight Thomas

Robert Wittenstein

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

**LORI BRILL:** I work with the Carl Vinson Institute, specifically with their strategic operations and planning assistance. Here is my boss, David Tanner. He is the Associate Director at the Institute.

**DAVID TANNER:** Thank you for using the Institute to help you with your work and and your research. Lori is a great faculty member and I am really happy that she is a part of this effort. We are all here to support the Commission. I have been at the Institute for over 10 years and I worked for the Governors office on planning and budget for three different governors.

The Chair asked the COO for the Administration's suggestions regarding amending the Charter in response to Emergency Procedures.

The Chair reiterated his call for commission members to call or email him with their thoughts about other issues to be reviewed by the Charter Review Commission.

## **VII: PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Stephen Binney, 1083 Seville Court, Clarkston, GA 30021. (See attached comments.)

Chairman Henson: Mr. Williams, do you have any other comments to offer?

COO Williams: I was definitely pleased and proud of the report from Mr. Robinson and the leadership that he's providing out in the Planning and Sustainability department. He stepped up over the past several months to fulfill the role of Deputy Director. The comments from our friends from the Ethics Board, so you know the conversation has gone well. I stand ready to apply any assistance necessary. I have no further comments.

## **VIII: NEXT MEETING DISCUSSION**

There was conversation about moving the next meeting to the second Thursday in February, which would be February 9, 2023.

Commissioner Neugent: Have we had anything in our previous meetings that are considered to be our public meetings?

Chairman Henson: We are to have five public hearings. One in each district. The public hearings were open and they were presented to the public as hearings. There was low turnout so we continued to have our official meetings but the emphasis was on the public hearing.

We've gone through the entire Charter and we don't have a lot of time left. We realize that we can't after setting the scope of the Charter, we know we can't address everything. We have some direction with the CEO and COO himself, Mr. Williams, and the County Attorney on how you address those. Also, we have to talk about what the other big things are that we want to look at. There are some things that

need to be changed because they are in conflict with state law or outdated or what have you and we can do those fairly easy.

POSSIBLE PUBLIC HEARING LOCATIONS IN THE FUTURE:

School Board – District 2 and 4  
Porter Sanford Center – District 5  
Senior Center – District 3  
Dunwoody City Hall – District 1

SUGGESTIONS FOR REPORTS FROM COUNTY DEPARTMENTS:

Code Enforcement  
Purchasing and Contracting  
Internal Auditor  
Planning and Sustainability

COO Williams: Mr. Chair, what I was thinking as you were speaking is if you'd like, you can provide questions through the Chair that we may be able to just provide you some written responses in the interest of your time.

Chairman Henson: I like that, if anybody has questions that they think can be answered by Mr. Williams or him getting those supplied to you, if you have his email you can send them to him directly; he wouldn't be offended or if not send them to me and he will do his utmost to answer them.

Commissioner Wittenstein: The Charter says that we have majority elections with runoffs. Whether or not state law dictates that cities and counties must have elections with 50 percent plus one with a runoff or whether state law only requires that for state elections, do we have flexibility in the current state law as to how DeKalb County might elect county commissioners.

Ms. Brill: I will provide you with what the State law says.

Rep. Bennett: I will check with the Secretary of State's office to see if there is any planned legislation regarding this matter and the possibility of allowing counties flexibility in how county commissioners are elected.

Mr. Grubiak: Please circulate all questions and answers to all members.

Chairman Henson: No further questions, may I have a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

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Stephen Henson, Chairman

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Barbara Sanders-Norwood, Clerk

Stephen Binney Public Comments:

Good evening, Charter Review Members,

How much transparency and communication should Dekalb County provide to its citizens? Hopefully more than it currently does. The Charter Review process is where decisions affecting this transparency can and must be made.

Transparency and communication are two-way streets. The citizens have a responsibility to search out the information and provide feedback to the county. On the flip side, it is the County's responsibility and job to provide easy access to this information.

Today finding the information you need or even the right forms to fill out in Dekalb County can be more like a mountain trek than a walk on the beach. Currently the official *newspaper* of record for DeKalb County is "The Champion". It is published once a week, I believe, and has a little over 40,000 subscribers. This in a county of nearly 800,000. "The Champion" is a fine newspaper but its reach is limited. When commissioners posted the legal notices that they were going to raise their pay by over 60% but nowhere else, they were able to walk it on and pass it without public input because the public was not aware of the pay raise.

I do not believe it is against the law to have more than one official newspaper of record for Dekalb County and if there is there is no reason the county could not post these legal notices in other local newspapers and sites also, if instructed in the new charter.

I am a big proponent of local and neighborhood news organizations and publishing these notices with papers and web sites in Tucker, Dunwoody, Stonecrest, or even organizations like Decaturish will not only allow Dekalb County's legal notices to be seen more easily by more people but will also end up getting more public input on proposed county changes. As a bonus, the increased revenue to these other news organizations could help in expanding their own local news coverage and encourage them to take a deeper interest in what is going on throughout Dekalb County.

Information is power and currently not enough information is being provided by the county to enable the public to exercise their power to form opinions or to effect change. Governmental authorities sometimes fail to realize the full benefits of public engagement when they do it on a piecemeal or occasional basis. Public engagement will be more effective and efficient if it is treated as a part of the normal governing process.

Effective public engagement requires specific types of expertise such as outreach and facilitation. A specific position such as an engagement coordinator can ensure that engagement is well executed.

County Commissioners and CEOs have important roles to play in public engagement. City administrators have the additional duty of helping staff to suppose and coordinate public engagement efforts. Public engagement can bridge two divides in these days where compromise and understanding are becoming a lost art. Most conventional engagement processes seem to encourage tensions and division among community members and between community members and their government.

In this day and age civic health matters. Transparency and public communication needs to be monitored and improved in the interest of the health, prosperity, justice, safety, and general well being of Dekalb County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



# Charter Review Commission

*Planning & Sustainability  
Development Services Update  
January 12, 2023*

- **Marcus Robinson, Chief Building Official**



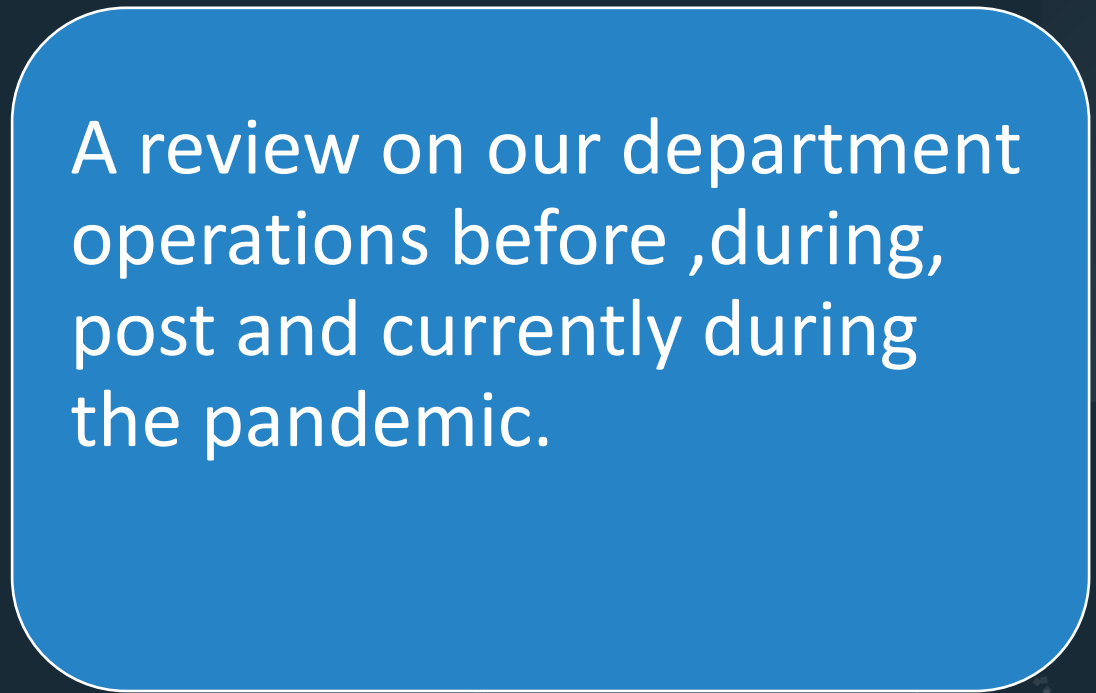
DeKalb County  
G E O R G I A

## PURPOSE

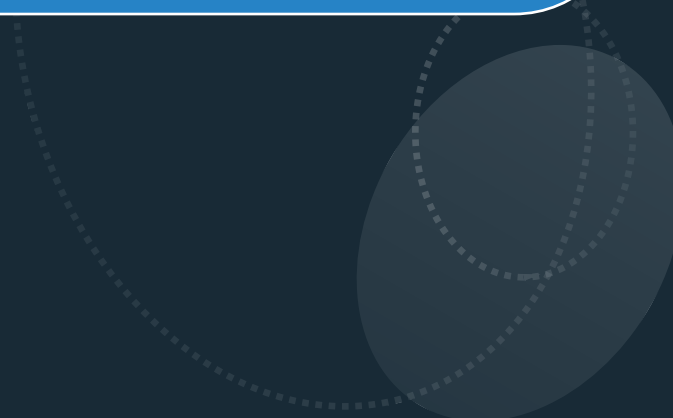
To update the commission on the advancements made by the Planning & Sustainability Department to deliver services to our customers.



# BACKGROUND



A review on our department operations before ,during, post and currently during the pandemic.



**2014 Matrix Consulting was hired to review our department processes for improvement**

**Matrix reported “needs of Improvement” highlights**

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**Unpredictability about service timelines**

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**Inaccessible information**

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**Commitment to meeting performance metrics and standards, and no focus on customer service**

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**The need for a one –stop-shop for all of Dekalb County permitting**

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**Update or New permitting system**

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**Antiquated regulations that add cost and time but low value to the permitting process.**

# CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## *BEFORE THE PANDEMIC*

## *DURING THE PANDEMIC*

## *CURRENT*

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### **BEFORE THE PANDEMIC**

#### Long Lines

Customer had to drop off applications and plans in person and could ask questions with our staff to address their concerns

Come back into the office to resubmit

Long wait times to speak with representatives

Paid timed Parking (Limited Parking)

Customer had to wait for help on each floor for a representative or travel to other areas of the county for services

### **DURING THE PANDEMIC**

Customers must

(1) learn to navigate the on-line permitting system

(2) Digitally submit documents,

(3) Utilize our website for contact information, and

(4) Wait for completion of all reviews with no electronic notification as to whether the application has been submitted properly.

(5) Operate with limited customer contact which has led to an overwhelming number of phone calls (weeks for a response).

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### **CURRENT**

Automation- Automation & Automation

Technology upgrades (HANSEN,PROJECT DOX,CAMINO & QMINDER)

The One-Stop- Shop

# The “One- Stop-Shop”

Opportunity to address the Community, Developers and Business owners Complaints through an Improved and Consolidated Service Approach. This is a recommendation of the Matrix Study and considered best practices across the country.



# One Stop Shop

Dekalb County has streamlined various development processes and departments into a ONE-STOP-SHOP permitting system. These services ensure that projects are safe and aligned with federal, state, and county codes.

- GIS
- Planning
- Zoning
- Watershed
- Transportation
- Sanitation
- Fire
- Land development
- Commercial Plan Review
- Permitting
- Business license
- Inspections

The Planning & Sustainability Department conducts intake for all permits even those for water meters, city reviews, sewer taps, etc.

# Customer Service Experience

- The One-Stop-Shop is designed specifically to make your permitting experience effective, efficient, and engaging. The “One-Stop-Shop” strives to provide convenient options to meet the needs of all customers.
- Onsite subject matter experts
- Reduce commuting
- Free Parking
- Enhanced online permitting system
- Clear Development Process





## ON GOING CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

Not officially open to public (but we are servicing walk-in customers)

Available for scheduled in person meeting or Zoom meetings.

Personnel - Filling Vacancies and offering competitive salaries.

Created Escalations Team

Continue to make changes to the ePermitting System

Residential Plan Review team proposed

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

- ✓ PROJECTDOX UPGRADE-COMPLETED
- ✓ HANSEN INFOR UPGRADE COMPLETED
- ✓ RHYTHM FOR CIVICS COMPLETED
  
- ✓ Installation of Rhythm for Civics and Workflow Improvements.
  
- ✓ Enhancements: Replacement of Dynamic Portal front end interface for citizens and businesses into IPS.
  
- ✓ Mobile Support – to ensure that the business and citizens can consistently access high-quality government services across all devices, from anywhere.
  
- ✓ Access applications on the go from any device, with real-time visibility into status via SMS, email and browser channel.

# Camino – Interactive Technology

## Camino Knowledge Guide

The Permit Guide is an easy-to-use web app that guides users step-by-step through the entire process of obtaining a permit.

Saves time

Improve efficiency



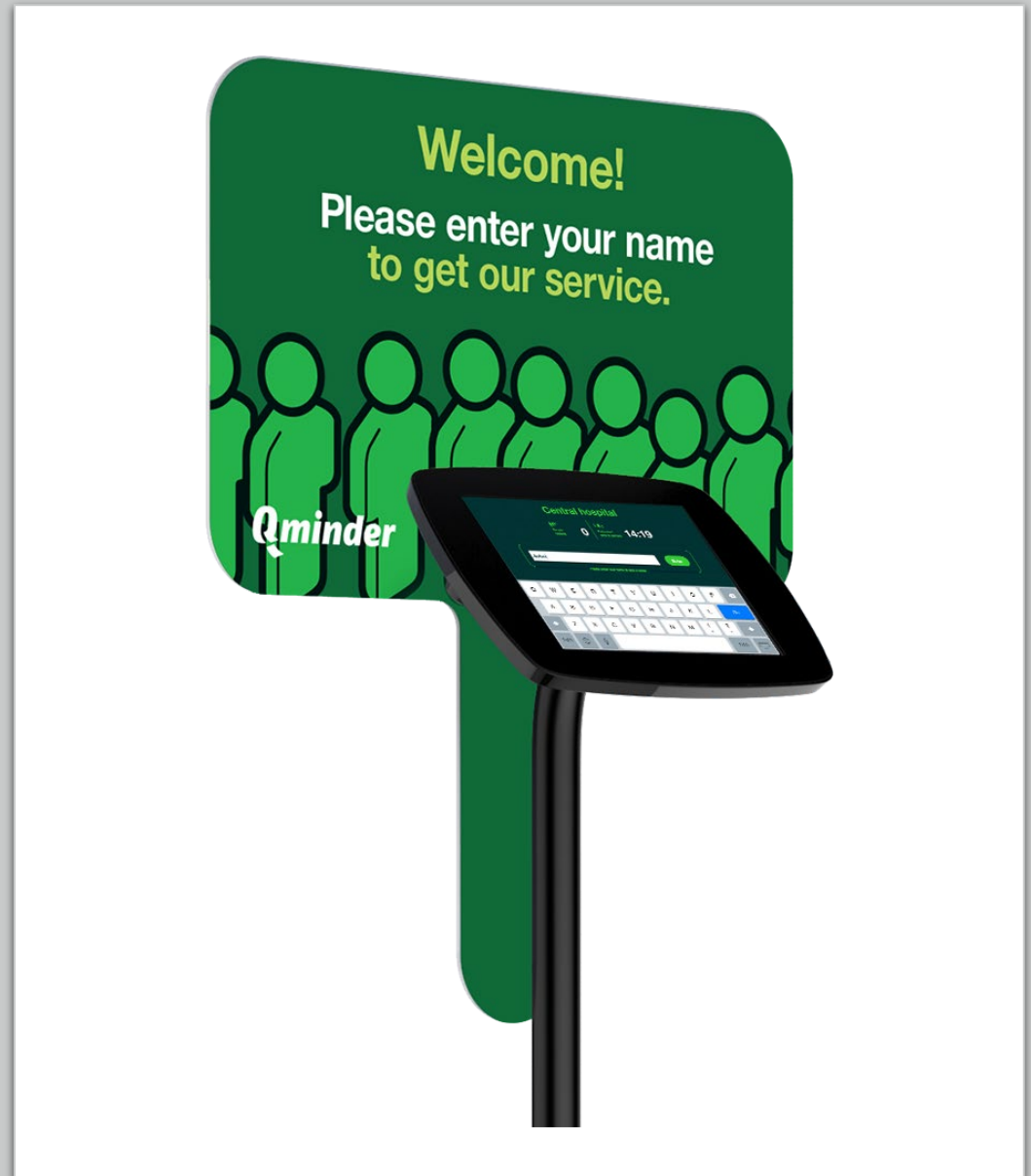
Additional Workflow Improvements Permitting, Business License, Zoning, Plans Review and Inspection Workflow.

# QMINDER-

- **Call Queue Management System**

- As we move to improve services online, we will be making improvements in Customer Service and Customer Management for in person meeting at our One Stop Shop.

- Check-in kiosk ~ Give your visitors the tools to self-sign in.
- Digital signage TV – Display your waiting list on a monitor.
- SMS messaging ~ Update and engage customers via SMS chat.
- Visit Planner ~ Let customers check in remotely.
- Service dashboard – Digitally track, manage and serve customers.
- Service Intelligence ~ Base business decisions on accurate data.





# Customer Service Call Center

- Currently Staff by 5 employees and managed by our Customer Service Administrator. This team is responsible for handling our department emails and phone calls.

Economic  
Development  
through  
Permitting

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Major construction projects continue

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Major Housing Developments

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Filming Industry

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Residential Improvements

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Warehouses

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Commercial business

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Restaurants

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Schools

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Medical Facilities

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# 2022 PERFORMANCE METRICS

Activity	2019	2020	2021	2022
Trade Inspections	39,800 inspections (12% increase with 99% completed on the date scheduled).	37,266 (7% decrease with 96% completed on the date scheduled)	27,779 (25% decrease in comparison to 2020 with 100% completed on date scheduled)	26,806 (99% completed on date scheduled; 4% decrease in comparison to 2021 FY)
Building Inspections	14,606 inspections (9% increase with 99% completed on the date scheduled)	11,946 inspections, decrease of 18% with 95% completed on the date scheduled)	9,514 (98% completed on date scheduled)	10,453 (99% completed on date scheduled; 10% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)
Environmental Inspections	NA	*3,431 (99% completed on date scheduled)	9,914 (99% completed on date scheduled)	12,259 (100% completed on date scheduled; 24% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)
Lobby Walk-Ins/Phone Calls	19,393 walk in customers	NA	36,804	48,459 (24% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)
Business License Phone Calls	NA	29,696	26,052 (12% decrease in comparison to 2020)	28,825 (4% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)
Business Licenses Issued	5,355	4,489	4,183 (7% decrease in comparison to 2020)	4,352 (3% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)*
*Development Revenues	\$8.0 million	\$5.2 million	\$6.9 million (32% increase in comparison to 2020)	\$7.5M (9% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)
Business License Revenues	\$7.4 million	\$6.8 million	\$7.1 million (4% increase in comparison to 2020)	\$6.7M (3% decrease in comparison to 2021 FY)
Permits Issued	21,504 (15,000 res. & 6,500 commercial)	13,168 (10,074 res. & 3,094 commercial)	14,833 (11,405 residential, 3, 428 commercial)	16,700 (12,455 residential, 4,245 commercial; 13% increase in comparison to 2021 FY)

# THANK YOU

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Questions