2009 City Council Retreat
MINUTES
March 6-7, 2009
Council Chambers

FRIDAY, March 6 – 8:00 a.m.
Mayor Logsdon called the meeting to order. Other Council Members present were Steve Boone, Don Haddix, Cyndi Plunkett, and Doug Sturbaum.

Copies of all the PowerPoint presentations are included in the official meeting file.

Financial Overview
Financial Services Director Paul Salvatore provided a financial overview, noting that, despite $1 million in cuts in the 2009 budget and $1.3 million in cuts for FY 2010, the City continued to face a $2.2 million shortfall in the coming budget year. The shortfall was largely due to a 10% decrease in sales taxes.

Sturbaum said he wanted to applaud staff for keeping up with the budget situation and keeping Council apprised. Logsdon said he was glad to hear sales taxes had risen in December, and wondered if the "Find it in Fayette" campaign had helped to keep sales tax dollars local. Sturbaum said it was important to keep emphasizing that message, and Plunkett said those who shopped online did not necessarily understand that saving sales taxes increased other taxes.

Logsdon said Newnan and Coweta County had not seen the same drop in sales taxes due to the new commercial development over the past year.

Citizen Survey
Public Information Officer/Acting City Clerk Betsy Tyler reviewed the results of the resident and business surveys conducted in early 2009, also providing comparisons among responses of those 65 and older and those who indicated they had children in their household. Tyler said she was still organizing the 2,500 individual comments and would be forwarding them to Directors and Chiefs to address recurring concerns and safety issues and for their consideration in drafting the FY 2010 budget.

Al Yougel of Keep Peachtree City Beautiful (KPTCB) observed that the high rating in popularity for the multi-use path system indicated that the City needed a very aggressive Adopt-a-Path program. He also speculated that the popularity of the recycling bins at Public Works was partly due to the survey going out just after the centers stopped accepting plastics.

Logsdon said he had concerns about just accepting that 75% of the respondents indicated a willingness to accept some level of tax increase, noting that the state might call for a referendum in June to increase the homestead exemption. He said how residents voted at that time on reducing their taxes would be just as important in judging if residents meant what they said in the survey. Council discussed making citizens aware of the implications of voting for the homestead exemption. City Attorney Ted Meeker said the City had to walk a very fine line in taking any side on a ballot question, and could only present the facts.

Haddix expressed frustration that many residents were unrealistic in their expectations that the City could maintain services without raising taxes. Logsdon added that residents would automatically see a tax increase because the state had discontinued the Homeowner Tax Relief Grants that reimbursed local governments for most of the existing homestead exemption.

Council asked to be included in the distribution of the survey comments when Tyler finished organizing them by subject.

50th Anniversary Update

Leisure Services Director Randy Gaddo said, in spite of economy, it was Peachtree City's 50th anniversary this year. He said several community groups would be incorporating the anniversary logo and theme into their events over the coming year. Promotional items featuring the anniversary logo would be available at the various functions, and they were now on sale in several public buildings. Gaddo showed the commemorative poster by Thomas Burns, who produced the Tour de Georgia prints, and said the artwork would be used on some of the promotional items. The Friends of the Library Association history book would be ready in April, and would be previewed at the official birthday celebration on Monday, March 9, at the Library. Gaddo said that, for the most part, the anniversary would be tied into ongoing annual events, with a special event to be held on September 25, the night before the Dragon Boat Races.

Logsdon said he had thought the Great Georgia Air Show would be part of the 50th, and Gaddo it was certainly possible, but no one from the air show had contacted him yet about tying in to the anniversary. Sturbaum asked if the District 4 North Little League Tournament would be here this year, and Gaddo confirmed that and said they would tie that in as well.

Discussion of Village Concept

City Planner David Rast gave an overview from the City's Land Use Plan about the Village Concept on which the City was developed. The village centers were to be located at major intersections and serve a community of about 10,000, with neighborhood activity centers, which were smaller versions of the village centers, scattered through each village. The plan did not identify specific tenants for each of the centers. The intent was that each village would be self-sufficient. The plan also identified future land use patterns and development philosophies, including mixed-use development (various uses in a compatible manner) and step-down development (density decreasing away from the village centers, and larger lots from Peachtree Parkway to the eastern border of the City).

Rast said Peachtree City's development had been consistent with the Land Use Plan adopted in 1985 and updated periodically since. Rast then reviewed ideas to help promote activity in the village centers, asking for Council input on some of the possible no-cost or low-cost incentives for the businesses.

Sturbaum asked to see some numbers on what the various suggestions would cost, and what the businesses thought they would bring back in.

Gaddo said signage restrictions were something of a hindrance for events trying to direct traffic. Rast said temporary signage in the rights-of-way for the events and directional signage were permitted, but applicants were proposing huge signs. Rast said he would look at the ordinance to help better educate event coordinators. Plunkett suggested nicer signage or banners, like what had been used for the Tour de Georgia.

Council suggested Planning create a condensed temporary signage guide for special events for Gaddo to use with special event coordinators. Plunkett said the City did not need to start allowing signs on the businesses, with banners and streamers. Logsdon noted that Alpharetta was relaxing their rules slightly, but only for about six months.

Rast said banner permits were limited to specific time frames and numbers per year. Staff could look at a longer time-frame, but that could start the City on a slippery slope. Logsdon said the Peachtree City Jewelers' closing signage, about which residents had complained, brought in more business in three weeks than the owner had seen in the entire time he had been there. Logsdon was not advocating that type of signage, but noted it helped the businesses. Rast said that some areas in the City had been identified for the poles and banners, but there were staffing costs associated with putting them up and managing them. Plunkett said she would rather see the pole banners than people with sandwich boards. Logsdon asked if the sandwich boards could be stopped. McMullen said they were not permitted in the right-of-ways. Meeker said regulating people walking around with signs was very difficult because the argument could be made that someone in a Coca-Cola t-shirt was advertising.

Council agreed that the first and last options (signage rules and forums and business assistance) were not to be pursued, but that staff should look at the others.

Rast then reviewed several possible incentives that had a financial cost to the City. Plunkett said she was hearing concern about older parts of the City aging, and how the City could encourage tenants to fill vacancies. She asked, if the City were really committed to having certain amenities in each village, then what, if anything, could the City do to encourage that type of redevelopment. She questioned whether the City should offer a competing grocery store an incentive to locate in a vacant space, and what other problems that could create. Plunkett suggested that the City and County development authorities might be able to suggest some options. Haddix said some of the suggestions had been in the works for a year now, and the authorities could do some things the City could not. Plunkett said the City's role might then be to facilitate collaboration among the authorities, tourism, etc. McMullen said the challenge was identifying "what we want" – how could a political body decide what was right for a retail center versus letting the market determine what would be profitable. Plunkett suggested tightening up the list of desired businesses for each village and possibly offering benefits to businesses on the "wanted" list.

Sturbaum endorsed having a roundtable with the various authorities to further discuss the issue. Rast said there had also been discussions about the DAPC and Planning Commission having a workshop to be on the same page – the DAPC was working with Clayton State about going into baby Kroger, but that had drastic impacts on the center in both a zoning and alcohol licensing respect. Plunkett said she thought there was consensus out there on what people wanted to see. Meeker said state law on Occupational Taxes allowed for certain economic development incentives. Plunkett said there were a lot of empty spaces, and the City had an opportunity to get what they wanted in there. Haddix said it went back to why authorities were created, to work independently and bring opportunities back to the city, rather than the city dictating what they did and did not do.

Solid Waste & Recycling Non-Exclusive Franchise
Tyler reviewed the options Council might want to consider in adopting a non-exclusive franchise requirement for solid waste and recycling, and asked for Council input. Representatives from several sanitation companies were in attendance.

Plunkett asked how many City residents were using a contracted garbage service. Tyler and Yougel indicated about 9,500 of the 10,500 single-family residential units.

Yougel noted Council had approved an agreement for his organization to have recycling collection stations, and KPTCB could not promote recycling without those stations running. He said there were two groups when dealing with recycling – those who were determined to recycle, who were not an issue, and the second group that did not recycle and did not know about recycling. Keep America Beautiful (KAB), Keep Georgia Beautiful (KGB), and KPTCB looked at how to educate the second group, and that required education on what to do and why, and making recycling convenient. Yougel said education was expensive, and the vendors would make concessions to obtain the contract. Yougel added that, in Canada, only 30% of household refuse made it to the waste stream, and since Canada's landfills were full, they sent that to the United States. He continued that the proposed agreement would not solve all problems, and the public still needed to be educated. However, the franchise fee would give KPTCB something to work with. Yougel urged Council to support the proposal.

Tyler noted that she had contacted the various sanitation companies about the discussion, and Cardinal Sanitation had called to express concern about the possibility of adding a franchise fee requirement. Meeker was still researching whether the City could charge the franchise fee.

Resident Lynda Wojcik said she felt yard waste should be included in the base price to help curtail illegal dumping of trimmings in the City's greenbelts.

The representatives from Republic, CLM, and Waste Management said they were not familiar with any type of catch pan that could be mounted to the truck. They said their crews carried spill kits in the trucks to address problems immediately, and then reported any spills for the company to come back and complete the clean-up. They also recommended some type of annual inspection of the trucks, noting that drivers performed daily inspections. Another issue was educating customers that items like paint, which caused some of the spills, could not be put in dumpsters.

Phyllis Aguayo noted that in Florida, they had mandatory recycling provided by the city, and the recycling container was three times the size of the garbage container. The recycling container had a list on the side of what items were accepted, and the garbage container had a list of what items were NOT accepted.

The haulers also indicated that yard waste raised costs. Plunkett asked how much it would cost to require once-a-month yard waste pickup as part of the base price. One of the haulers estimated $2 per month. Logsdon asked if the yard waste could be rotated among the vendors serving the City, but they noted that spring and fall had dramatically higher amounts of yard waste, so that it would not be equitable. Haulers also had no way of knowing what houses were paying other haulers, versus not paying for service at all. Haddix said that those who dumped yard waste in the greenbelt might not have any service. Logsdon noted that yard waste was easier to throw in the green belts undetected.

The haulers felt they could implement the new requirements in 120 days.

Council supported amending the ordinance and creating a franchise agreement to include recycling in the base price, addressing leaks and spills, and requiring quarterly reports. Haddix and Plunkett felt yard waste should be a required but not as part of the base price.

Update of Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)
City Engineer Dave Borkowski reviewed the City projects in the State Transportation Improvement Plan. Due to the slope, stormwater, and utility challenges and the associated cost increases, Plunkett asked if the gateway bridge on Highway 54 West needed to be relocated. Borkowski said this was the only available location in this area. Council asked Rast and Borkowski to provide a firm date on completion of the CSX bridge path connections.

Plunkett asked Logsdon about proposals to consolidate the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT), and expressed concern about additional hoops the City would have to jump through for these types of projects. Logsdon said he did not think consolidation could happen in 2009. Logsdon also asked Meeker about using SPLOST funds for the path at the CSX Bridge, and Meeker thought that was possible.

Aguayo commented about traffic backing up at Walt Banks/Peachtree Parkway, but noted it moved very quickly. She felt having that intersection as a priority in this economy was a waste of tax dollars, and said there were bigger traffic problems in the City. Borkowski clarified that the planned improvements were designed to see the City through 2027. Aguayo said the anticipated traffic from the shopping center had also not been as bad as anticipated.

SPLOST
Borkowski then reviewed the projects financed by the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). The SPLOST ran from 2005 – 2010.

Sturbaum asked about the status of the Baseball/Soccer Complex (BSC) traffic light. Borkowski said the City had requested that signal several times, but it did not meet the warrants. McMullen said he and the Mayor had met with Senator Chance, Representative Ramsey, and the DOT Commissioner, and despite the discussion in the meeting, the letter the City received from DOT was that they would look at it after the widening. Plunkett asked if it could be done without the warrants, and McMullen said it had to meet the warrants on the state highway. Borkowski said they would do counts at the next tournament, and Gaddo said he would request that.

Aguayo asked, as road widenings and turn lanes kept coming up, that the City remember how hard the City had fought for the existing greenbelts that made Peachtree City what it was.

SPLOST Finances

Salvatore then gave a financial update on the Transportation SPLOST, noting that revenues were lower than anticipated due to the economy. The last collection date would be March 2010.

Plunkett asked what happened if voters did not approve a new SPLOST, and Salvatore reviewed what items the new laws allowed to be included in SPLOST (existing GO bond debt, maintenance and operations costs, etc.), and noted that, under the new law, it could distributed based on population ratios if an agreement was not reached among jurisdictions in a County. This would mean Peachtree City would receive $7 million per year, versus the $2 million per year under the current split. If the SPLOST were not reapproved by the voters, then the street and path resurfacing costs (about $1.7 million or 0.87 mills) would have to be covered another way. McMullen added that the state was also looking at getting rid of the Local Assistance Road Project (LARP) funding (approximately $100,000 per year to the City). Additionally, capital equipment that could be covered by the next SPLOST ($1.2 million) would still need to be covered in the City budget if the next SPLOST failed.

Plunkett said it would be important to remind the Fayette County Board of Commissioners that the City was a part of the County, even though the County did not seem interested in renewing the SPLOST right away. Logsdon said it was imperative to put the question back to the voters because it had been such a benefit. He suggested bringing it up at the April Association of Fayette County Governments (AFCG) meeting, and to continue to emphasize the issue to the County Commissioners at every contact.

Wojcik asked if the City could hold its own SPLOST, but Meeker said it would have to be a County-wide effort. A Municipal Option Sales Tax referendum (MOST) was the only thing a City could have separately. Logsdon asked if the various entities in Fayette County could designate different uses for the SPLOST funds. Meeker said yes, but the ballot would have to list the full spectrum of uses being considered. Boone asked if there was a consensus among the cities about the SPLOST. McMullen said the discussion had not gone that far because the County was still pondering whether to call for another one.

McMullen said that, under the new law, if all the jurisdictions reached an agreement on the distribution, the SPLOST could run for six years. If they could not agree and the default population distribution were implemented, it could only be implemented for five years.

Eisworth said that, with the new regulations, the County needed additional fire stations that could be covered by SPLOST. Logsdon said the state legislature was also looking at a regional transportation SPLOST, and that some versions had a regional opt-out. However, Peachtree City was part of Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), so that complicated things. Plunkett felt the regional SPLOST question would not come up until 2011, so the local referendum needed to occur prior to that. Wojcik said she felt the wider the range of uses, the less appealing a SPLOST would be to the voters. She felt it really needed to be focused.

Potential projects to be covered by a new SPLOST included right turn lanes and a signal at TDK/Dividend, Crosstown/Peachtree Parkway signal and turn lanes, SR 54/Robinson intersection improvements, SR 54/Comerce Drive median closure with alternate SR 74 intersection signalization, SR74/S Kedron signalization, Georgian Park/Peachtree Parkway signalization, maintenance and inspection of existing ridges and tunnels, safety evaluation of all path intersections, path connections associated with the tunnels under SR 74 S at Rite Aid and Rockaway Road, the Kedron boat docks path crossings, street resurfacing, path resurfacing and extensions, fire vehicles, and police vehicles.

Multi-use Path System Master Plan

Rast gave an overview of the path system, saying new development was required to connect to the system, but the City usually identified other projects needed around town by citizen requests followed by evaluation.

Logsdon asked about the SR 74 S highway widening project being let in July 2009, and noted that the Sommersby developers were supposed to be participating in the cost of the tunnel. Logsdon felt they might not get their financing in time. Plunkett suggested that they could exchange the six acres for the $250,000 contribution.

Rast said that the City would be better funding the future projects through SPLOST or the General Fund, versus trying to get grants and facing the constantly changing requirements in getting that funding.

Cart Path / Street Resurfacing Update

Public Services Director Tom Corbett provided an update on the path and street resurfacing programs. The City-wide rating of paths had been completed in 2009 to prioritize the path maintenance beginning in 2010. Corbett noted the dramatic increase in path resurfacing in 2006 was due to the SPLOST funding. McMullen added that two of the Public Works employees on the streets and paths crews were funded through SPLOST. Corbett said there was no street resurfacing scheduled for 2009, and the department would focus on patching and crack sealing.

Stormwater Utility Update

Stormwater Manager Mark Caspar gave an overview of the Stormwater Utility since its inception in 2006. The 2009 bills and information letter would go out during the first week of April.

This year's projects included work on the lowest of the three ponds in Braelinn, the Flat Creek Villas drainage (tentative), completion of the Bridlepath project by the end of March, flood remediation on Lakeside Drive for the outflow pipe from Booth Middle School and Waterwood Bend, replacing the culvert behind City Hall feeding into Lake Peachtree, and the design of Rockspray Pond dam improvements to address any problems that might develop, even though implementation would require an additional stormwater bond.

Plunkett asked when the original projected rate increase was and Caspar said year five, which was 2010. McMullen said the original rate was set when the City did not know what it had to maintain. The original estimate on the stormwater system was about half of what the inventory had revealed. Caspar added that, along with 6,500 structures, there were miles of corrugated pipe to maintain. Logsdon asked if there were stormwater issues before the current state legislature, and Plunkett said North Georgia Legislator Tom Gale wanted to make stormwater payments a tax, and implement a different type of funding. Plunkett said they had sent him the Stormwater Basics article the City had published in 2006 that explained the whole utility process and rationale. Logsdon said he thought Fayette County was also looking at implementing a stormwater utility.

Overview of Code Enforcement and Property Maintenance

Senior Code Enforcement Officer Tami Babb reviewed the City's Code Enforcement Department, noting that 2009 marked the 10th year since the City had enacted property maintenance codes, which ensured safe structures. The department also dealt with delinquent business taxes (occupational taxes, hotel/motel taxes, and alcohol taxes), residential parking restrictions, water regulations, fences, accumulation of brush and debris, graffiti on private property, and other codes. Babb indicated that Municipal Judge Stephen Ott had requested some modifications to the residential parking restrictions to clarify a few issues. Babb said the department was seeing increasing problems with foreclosures due to the condition they were being left in and the fact that they were not being purchased quickly.

Newspapers in Driveways

Rast addressed the question of newspapers in driveways, noting that Code Enforcement was seeing the papers build up in the driveways of many properties, not all of them vacant. Staff wanted Council's opinion for requiring post mounted newspaper mailboxes. Logsdon said he would like it, but Boone felt the carriers would not use them. Logsdon disagreed, saying he had lived in other cities that required newspaper boxes. Haddix said the City needed to do something about the people who would not pick up the newspapers. Haddix said it would slow down a carrier, and noted multiple papers were delivered on some days of the week. Meeker said he did not know what the City might legally do, but would check. Tyler added that, in the past, the City had refrained from prohibiting the distribution of the papers due to freedom of the press issues, but residents could individually request that the papers stop delivery.

Logsdon felt keeping the newspapers from being thrown in the driveway would be the best way to address the issue. Haddix said they probably could not dictate that the box be mounted below the mailbox, and Rast said the sample shown was only one example. Boone noted that some neighborhoods had covenants dictating the appearance of mailboxes and posts.

Local media members present said there was a huge variety of mailboxes in the City, so there probably would not be a one-size-fits-all answer. Increased costs in delivery and the individual cost to the homeowners to install a newspaper box were other issues to consider. One resident noted that replacing the papers in the driveways with ugly green posts and plastic mailboxes in every yard was not a real improvement. Haddix agreed that, in his neighborhood, the newspaper boxes were considered unsightly.

State of the Police Department

Police Chief H.C. "Skip" Clark reviewed the organizational structure of the department, which had two current openings and two positions vacant due to military deployment. With the current level of calls for service, the patrol division was about six positions short. The Criminal Investigations Division was seeing an overall increase in Part I and Part II crimes, especially in fraud and identity theft, and if a major crime occurred (bank robbery, etc.), then all five members of the CID Team would be assigned to that investigation for the first 48-72 hours. At some point, the department would need a dedicated fraud investigator, at an estimated cost of about $75,000 (including specialty training and vehicle).

Clark also reported on the progress of the training program to begin in late April, the taser program to be implemented in late March, the new school safety zones, reserve police officer program (planned to be active with five officers in late 2010), the street gang program (ongoing), stop graffiti program (ongoing), County tactical narcotic team participation, alcohol ordinance enforcement, golf cart course, officer training, the Community Emergency Response Team classes, the Citizens Police Academy, and ongoing compliance to retain accreditation.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Ed Eiswerth said his was probably the only presentation that would tell Council how to save the taxpayers money. Captain Dave Williamson gave an update on the ISO preliminary inspection results and anticipated the City's ISO rating being upgraded from a 4 to a 3. This would save many citizens money on their homeowner insurance if they contacted their insurance agency. Williamson said that the department also wanted to pursue ambulance accreditation at this time in lieu of fire accreditation because 75% of the department's calls each year were medical calls. Eiswerth reviewed the state of the department. Captain Clint Murphy reviewed the pre-plan program that put plans for 1,051 non-residential buildings into a system firefighters could use to navigate in a fire.

Sturbaum asked if businesses making structural changes notified the Fire Department to update the pre-plans. Murphy said that was not required, but the Fire Marshal was sending the plans ahead. Eiswerth added that was why the department would be reinspecting the structures each year.

Assistant Chief Joe O'Connor provided an overview of the new EOC software developed with the City's IT Department.

Eiswerth indicated he had originally had six additional firefighters in the 2009 budget, but had delayed it to 2010. He still needed those positions to ensure two personnel per piece of equipment.

Other issues facing the department were repairs needed to address a moisture problem at Fire Station 82, and problems with the parking pad at Station 81. The department was also anticipating two new stations over the next three years, one on SR 74 South at the Baseball Soccer Complex and one in Wilksmoor Village.

The Friday session ended at 5:15 p.m.

SATURDAY, March 7 – 8:00 a.m.
Mayor Logsdon called the meeting to order. Other Council Members present were Steve Boone, Don Haddix, Cyndi Plunkett, and Doug Sturbaum.

Copies of all the PowerPoint presentations are included in the official meeting file.

Municipal Court – Community Service through KPTCB
Acting Administrative Services Director Nikki Vrana said Council had requested that staff look into court-ordered community service through KPTCB. This specific service could help to address the increasing litter problem, help compensate for some of the eliminated positions that picked up litter, and help KPTCB with visibility. A drawback to community service for every violation would be the potential for jail sentences for very minor infractions (seatbelt violation – standard fine $15) if the person did not pay to go on probation or complete the mandated community service.

Plunkett and Sturbaum said part of the reason for fines was to teach a lesson, and community service, like a fine, was in lieu of a jail sentence. Meeker said that imposing community service would ultimately be at the discretion of the judge.

Other potential challenges to the program included state laws governing probation, liability to the City, alternate programs for disabled offenders, training the KPTCB team, determining where to assign teams (assigning to the paths could educate potential future offenders on another potential location for crimes), weather conditions, and a potential stigma from the community.

Vrana reviewed programs ongoing in Coweta and Henry Counties, City of Smyrna (required first 10 hours of community service to go to the recycling program), and the City of LaGrange. Vrana then reviewed the historical convictions for Driving Under the Influence (DUI), which had a mandated period of community service. If 10 hours of service with KPTCB were required of each offender, the City would realize over 1,400 hours of service.

Logsdon asked if the City could work with the judge to ensure that "undesirable" offenders were not put in the program, and Vrana said that was certainly possible. Chief Clark said the City Solicitor could run background checks. Meeker asked if there had been discussions between KPTCB and the probation service, and Yougel confirmed there had been. Plunkett said she would like to see fluorescent pink safety vests used to identify offenders performing community service. Logsdon said he wanted to see a number of probation hours mandated to KPTCB.

Yougel said his focus would be picking up litter that has gotten into the stormwater system and stream beds, and let the volunteers who picked up litter along the rights-of-way and paths continue to do so in those areas.

Council agreed staff should pursue this program.

Lake Peachtree Restoration Plan
Borkowski explained that Lake Peachtree served as both a source of drinking water and a recreational amenity. The City owned the lake, but it was operated via contract by the Fayette County Water System, who was responsible for the maintenance of the lake and dam and for routine dredging. The lake was last dredged in June 2003 in several areas along the western bank and in the area just south of Highway 54, and the next dredging should occur in 2011.

Borkowski said there were several concerns with long-term maintenance of the lake, including sedimentation, aquatic vegetation, and pollution. Currently, the lake was being dredged on an eight-year cycle, and grass carp were used to manage the vegetation,

Logsdon asked if the lake was safe for events like the triathlon with the volume of vegetation in the lake. Gaddo said a path was cleared for the adult triathlon, but he did not think the amount of grass carp the City was putting in this year (with funding from the City and County) had been done for many years. Plunkett asked for a report in six months to see if the fish were making a difference. Gaddo said adding the grass carp would need to be done on a regular schedule in the coming years.

Eiswerth said the dive team trained in the lake and indicated the lake was getting shallower, due to sediment and weeds, especially over the past two years.

Borkowski said the final effort involved non-point stormwater management, enforcing stream buffers, sediment control enforcement for new construction, maintaining the existing stormwater structures, and educating the public on litter and pollution. He said the horse was out of the barn in that the watershed was already developed and was built prior to a lot of the protective requirements now in place. That made things more challenging, but still not impossible.

Borkowski said the City could partner with United Consulting to look at sediment levels and lake depths, evaluate water quality during rain events, identify sediment sources, address vegetation management, and identify options for the island in the lake. The City should also continue to work with the County to develop a long-term plan for managing the lake. Borkowski estimated a $36,000 cost to obtain a comprehensive study on the lake.

Logsdon asked if the county would be obligated to participate in the cost via the contract. McMullen said the agreement was very specific on identifying areas for dredging, and the County had historically stuck very tightly to those requirements. Plunkett pointed out that the County's focus right now was Lake McIntosh.

Logsdon said the City needed to look at the lake now, including the lagoon area north of 54, which was catching a lot of the sediment and filling up faster than the lake. McMullen confirmed that the Cherry Branch and the lagoon were very shallow.

Logsdon said the lake was a signature feature of the community, and the City needed to move forward despite the poor economy. He felt it could be done in stages. Boone said it was actually a concern for the whole county because the lake was a drinking water source. McMullen said the contract with the County was very specific, and the County was focusing its finances on the new lake. Final costs to fix the problems would go over seven figures. Logsdon said he would like to see the island, which was built with sediment from an earlier dredging, removed from the lake, and McMullen said that would add another seven figures to the project.

Sturbaum asked if there were any federal funds available for this type of project. Borkowski said there were loans for drinking water projects, and he would check further into that.

Gaddo said another issue was what to do with the silt . In 2003, it was dried on Drake Field prior to transport, and the field had not recovered yet. McMullen said if the County did the dredging, the City needed to review the specifications.

Logsdon said he would like to see the City pursue the project. Plunkett asked if it could be a SPLOST project, and Meeker said yes. She said that might help to convince the County to move forward with the SPLOST.

Haddix asked if the study had progressed upstream to the golf course, noting changes in the streams over the years. Borkowski said the study would include that area.

Yougel said there had been requests for KPTCB to clean up around the inlets by Picnic Park, and asked if that area would be addressed. Borkowski said it would be looked at, but would require a wetlands permit.

Logsdon asked staff to identify funding for the study.

Tennis Center

Gaddo said that, since the Council Workshop discussing the Tennis Center in November, staff had met with many groups, from casual players to professionals. The majority seemed to favor the City running the center. In reviewing 19 other centers in Georgia, Peachtree City's center was unique, making direct comparisons a challenge. Five were contracted and several of the others had been contracted, but had reverted to public operation. Some contractors had found it difficult to make a "profit." Gaddo felt the city should err on the side of due diligence. It looked like outsourcing could work, and staff felt that requests for proposal should be sent out. He also suggested allowing the current staff to submit a proposal.

Phil Mahler said the tennis center was one of the two reasons he moved here (the other was the paths). He said the center was very important, and he felt outsourcing was not appropriate due to the quality of life issues for the center. He said it brought in tournaments that provided revenue and generated interest in the City as a place to live.

Logsdon asked why he would oppose it if outsourcing could provide the same level of service. Mahler said it could not provide the same level of service. Logsdon said that had not been determined. He realized outsourcing was not always the answer, but he wanted to at least see some proposals. Mahler asked Council to consider putting another authority over the center's management, noting that the Tourism Association had indicated a desire to be out of the tennis business. Haddix said this was the second authority to operate the center, and there had been problems with both, but one of the proposers was the current group of employees and the manager.

Yougel said he did not play tennis anymore, but when putting out information from KPTCB at the various City facilities, he felt the Tennis Center was so commercialized that it did not have counter room for the information. From a non-tennis player point of view, he would like to see the center more closely aligned with the community.

Gaddo stressed that, even if the operation were to be outsourced, there would be significant oversight from the City. Meeker said any such agreement would also be year-to-year, and would include an annual review of service levels.

Council agreed to move forward with the RFP, but Plunkett said she still preferred keeping it under the City.

Hip Pocket Sewer Connection

Borkowski reviewed a presentation given to Hip Pocket area residents on February 12 outlining the issues and costs to provide sewerage service to the neighborhood. He noted there were several neighborhoods in the City on septic systems verses connected to sewer, and the Hip Pocket area was the oldest and the closest to the drinking water source of Lake Peachtree.

The City's review of the issue had been precipitated by several homes and businesses having to construct emergency connections to the sewer system following septic failure.

Borkowski said 10 lots in the area had connected to sewer in the past 18 years, and another 29 had replaced leach fields, drain lines, or entire septic systems (half of those in the last eightt years). Several lots (16) would face challenges in replacing their system due to lot size and limited availability for new systems due to structure additions, poor soil quality, steep topography, drainage flow, or lake or stream setbacks. For those lots, connection to sewerage might end up as the only option if the newer types of septic systems could not be made to work on the site. The remainder of the 71 lots on septic had various options for replacing failing systems.

Borkowski noted that the previous week, another septic system on Hip Pocket had failed, and in one of the failures in the earlier years, the house had been declared uninhabitable until a sewer connection was constructed. The current approach was to address the failures as they occurred. An alternative was constructing a public, low pressure sewer system to serve the entire area.

Borkowski addressed costs for various solutions, noting that every lot would face one of the options at some point in the future.

- Replacing conventional septic - $5,000 – $10,000
- Engineered/advanced septic system replacement - $15,000 or more
- Individual connection to sewer - $20,000 – $32,000 (with homeowner responsible for maintaining all pipe in right of way to the public sewer line, even if damaged by utilities or neighbors)

Borkowski noted that there was only about 14 feet on the side of the road for all the utilities, and sewer lines had to be separated from water lines by at least 10 feet.

- Connecting entire area to sewer – (approximately $936,000 to build / $10,400 per lot)

If financed, the cost per home would be about $1,400 per year for 15 years or $1,156 for 20 years. Those costs were for design and construction only, and the City would make no money from the project. These costs were normally absorbed in the original purchase of a home or lot in a neighborhood.

Plunkett asked if Borkowski's numbers envisioned the homeowners paying for the entire cost, and Borkowski said yes. Plunkett asked if the same thing applied to a new neighborhood being built, and if the developer paid the entire cost of constructing the system. Borkowski confirmed this.

Borkowski said one option to finance the project was a revenue bond, which would require a referendum among the affected residents with a majority voting in favor. The bond would be repaid via special tax assessments. Another option would be bonds issued through the Water & Sewerage Authority (WASA), which would not require a vote.

Sturbaum asked if this could be done by SPLOST, and Meeker said no. Haddix asked if the funding costs were the same whether the City did the bond or WASA did, and McMullen said yes.

Borkowski listed the benefits of public sewer, noting that it offered a long-term solution, maintenance of the lines in the ROW would be the responsibility of WASA, and it reduced the risk of sewage entering Lake Peachtree.

Boone asked if the WASA maintenance responsibility was comparable to other neighborhoods. Borkowski said usually a homeowner was responsible for the sewer line from the home to the connection at the street. In this case, WASA would be responsible for slightly more of the line. Logsdon asked if the neighbors currently on grinder pumps would be allowed to join the project, and Borkowski said they would have that option.

The drawbacks to the public sewer option were the installation costs, the addition of a monthly sewer bill to the homeowners' budgets, the loss of investment for any owners who had recently installed new septic systems. However, the design of the project needed to cover the entire area.

Borkowski said staff had received a lot of feedback from Hip Pocket residents who attended the February meeting, with two residents in favor of the sewer proposal, one in favor if the City paid, and 16 opposed to the proposal (mainly those who had installed septic systems recently). Many were not currently concerned about their septic systems, and others were concerned the owners along the lake would see a greater benefit than those off the lake, and that the cost should be distributed differently.

Borkowski said staff was asking for feedback.

Kim Learnard, Loblolly Circle, read a letter from Ralph Jones (neighbor, former Mayor) expressing concern that the current economy was not the right time for this project, and the City should ultimately pay to install the sewer mains. His septic system had been in place for 46 years with no problems.

Learnard said that she, as a member of the homeowners' board, had heard from 30 neighbors, with only one in favor of the project. Many felt they had paid for the project through taxes, and the City was imposing the entire cost on the residents. She had a petition signed by 46 families opposing the proposal.

Rex Brown, Hilltop, objected that septic tanks were no more temporary than anything else in the world. The project would be good for the community, and that included Peachtree City and Fayette County, and he felt all of those who benefit should pay the cost.

Randy Wortman, Hilltop Drive, addressed contamination of the drinking water, noting that runoff from as far as the Post Office and gas station washed into the lake. He did not think any of the leach fields were causing the problems. Logsdon pointed out that Council and staff had addressed a comprehensive study of the lake prior to his arrival for this agenda item.

Bob Johnson, Hilltop Drive, said the Lake Peachtree neighborhood was the original subdivision and was fairly self sufficient. Many of the residents were retired and on a fixed income, and felt bringing this up now was unwise.

Earl Randall, Pebblestump Point, said he thought some neighborhoods had sewer added after the homes were built, but staff could not confirm that. The majority of neighborhoods had the sewer system installed when the neighborhood was developed, with the total cost of the developed lot (including roads and utilities) included in the new home price.

Bill Matthews, Pinecrest Drive, said he was concerned about eventual double dipping, with the value of the home increasing due to sewer service followed by an increase in property taxes.

Ryan Graham said his parents had owned their home at on Hip Pocket for 30 years, and the system was fine. He felt the cost was ridiculous, and said the Hip Pocket community was against the project.

Phyllis Aguayo, Stonington Drive, said when installed and maintained properly in appropriate soils, septic actually gave better water back than the sewage that was chemically treated. She wanted to know what the City could do to better educate septic owners on how to properly maintain their systems.

Carol Martinson, Hip Pocket, had five people in her home, and had to drain her septic system twice since December due to her system failing. She said she had no choice – she did not want to go into debt for this, but would love to be on the sewer system. She was in an emergency situation and did not know who else might be in the same boat.

Richard Fehr from the Fayette County Health Department said most facts presented were accurate, and for the past five years the County had been working to educate the public about septic system maintenance. Plunkett asked what other information he felt needed to be added. Fehr said that the State Board of Health felt there was no advantage to putting additives into septic systems.

Logsdon asked who approved replacement of septic systems, and Fehr said the County Health Department. Logsdon asked if, worst case scenario, Ms. Martinson could not put in a new system, then what her option would be. Haddix said when septic systems became inefficient, they needed to be moved because the soil can no longer support the system.

Logsdon said his concern was that, if Ms. Martinson's situation was the worst case and she could not replace the septic system or connect to sewer, Borkowski said the house would have to be vacated. Logsdon noted that, in that type of case, if multiple failures started, it could bring down the property values. He said the City would continue to research the issue and make a recommendation, but was not going to force the issue.

Floyd Harrell, Loblolly, asked if the older requirements for septic could be grandfathered for these properties. Fehr said those were state requirements that reflected standards based on newer information on how septic systems functioned over time, and any replacements would have to meet the new requirements.

Haddix said he had friends in the septic business who were seeing a lot more septic systems in Hip Pocket fail over the past eight years, and they felt the area was reaching the point that it would have to go on sewer. Borkowski said he suspected several homes currently had one or two residents, and the City would see a lot more systems fail if or when they sold to larger families.

Boone said it was ultimately a risk the homeowners would have to take on whether to do it or wait. Plunkett said that, if the City was going to require it in terms of it being in the best interests of the City, then she agreed that all who benefit should pay. She wondered if there were a way for the City to participate and allow those who wanted to hook up now to do so at a good rate, and make it significantly more expensive for those who opted to wait.

Haddix disagreed, noting that the developer installed sewer and then sold the lots to builders including the cost of that sewer system. Plunkett agreed but said it was a slightly different issue if the City determined it was for the benefit of the entire community.

Logsdon asked about the possibility of a Tax Allocation District. McMullen said Senoia obtained a Rural Development Grant to help with the costs of installing sewer, but the residents were paying the remaining costs for the bond through higher sewer rates. Staff had discussed the whole customer base of WASA paying for it, but WASA's manager had indicated the bond covenants would not allow for distributing the cost in that manner. McMullen said Borkowski was looking into options under the stimulus package, but staff did not know at this point if this project would be eligible.

Sturbaum said the City was in an information-gathering mode at this time. Logsdon said they were not making a decision, but asked staff to contact WASA to pinpoint all the options about spreading out the cost.

Bob Johnson asked about the life span of a sewer plan, and said the City was not comparing apples to apples if they were saying septic systems were not permanent, but sewer systems were.

Haddix reminded Council that the City could be setting a precedent for any other area needing to connect to sewer. Council thanked the members of the public who attended and said the City would keep the residents informed of their findings.

Update/Guidance on 2010 Budget

Rast gave a review of the housing market, noting that the Mayor's intern in 2008 looked at the real estate market, and staff had updated that report with current numbers. In August 2008, there were 325 homes for sale in PTC and 37 homes going into foreclosure (140 County-wide). In February 2009, there were 325 homes for sale, and 15 homes going into foreclosure (101 County-wide).

Year-to-date closings by August 2008 had been 302, compared to 391 for the same period in 2007, with 90 closings year-to-date in 2009. In 2007, the average list price was $311,571, with average sale price being $303,734. In 2008, those numbers were $329, 264 and $317,113 respectively (excluding condos). Currently, the average list price was $419,350, and the average sales price was $343,839.

Sturbaum asked about including the average sales price of foreclosures being purchased. Haddix said it would be more telling to analyze the sales by price ranges

Real Estate Agent Vanessa Fleisch said foreclosures were on Multiple Listing Service (MLS), noting that only Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and Pacific Investment Management Company (PIMCO) properties would not necessarily be on MLS.

McMullen said he wanted to present the information because property taxes made up a third of the City's revenue sources. That would help when projecting revenues for the FY 2010 budget. He said staff would be reporting on this periodically.

Haddix asked if MLS also gave the assessed value or comparison to what it sold for two years ago. Fliesch said that would not be in MLS.

Rast said staff also looked at commercial vacancy rates as of May 30, 2008, noting that it was 12% in Braelinn, 3% in Kedron, 11% in Westpark Walk, 8.45% in Wilksmoor, and 5% in Wilshire Pavilion. The study included commercial, office, etc. The City-wide vacancy rate had been 7.16% in May 2008.

In February 2009, the retail vacancy rate for the 1.77 million square feet was 9%. Aberdeen Village (all retail) was 25%, Braelinn 11%, Glenloch 8%, Kedron 4%, and Wilksmoor 5% (not including the unfinished Shoppes at the Village Piazza, which was about 80% pre-leased).

Sturbaum asked if any of the Shoppes preleases were from other villages, and Rast said the only one he knew of was the golf center at Braelinn Village. Haddix said he had heard there were additional ones.

Rast said the Industrial Park had about 850,000 square feet vacant in existing buildings (473 acres still remained undeveloped).

Judi-ann Rutherford asked how much of the currently vacant industrial space had never been filled, and Rast estimated about 200,000 square feet. Rutherford pointed out that the City had not simply lost that many tenants. Rast also noted that the Photocircuits buildings would be very challenging to redevelop due to the condition of the facilities and the types of activities that had gone on there. Babb said the owners had indicated they were marketing the buildings through Group VI and were optimistic about some potential leads. McMullen asked if the owner had indicated whether they had done Phase 1 or Phase 2 Environmental Studies, and Babb said they had not indicated either way. Logsdon said the City needed to look closely at the Photocircuits buildings to determine what needed to be done to make them usable. McMullen said that promoting use of these buildings might be a worthwhile project for the DAPC. McMullen said someone needed to do those environmental studies, and the City should work with Group VI to see that they were conducted.

Rast said the City also needed to get a full listing of square footage in the Industrial Park to determine the total vacancy rate for industrial spaces.

Hotel/Motel Tax Law

Meeker went over the current distribution of the City's hotel/motel tax (currently 6%), the implementation process for hotel/motel tax rates greater than 5%, and the 2008 tax revisions regarding the purpose of the tax.

Logsdon asked if modifying the City's hotel/motel tax rate could be accomplished during the current legislative session. Meeker said it was possible but not likely. McMullen said attempting to meet the deadline would also send the wrong message to the local hotels. He said, if Council wanted to pursue it, then the City needed to select a project and determine the benefit to the hotel/motel owners. Rutherford added that the City also needed to factor in the cost to operate and maintain the project. Haddix asked staff to see if golf cart paths could be included, and Meeker said the tie-in would be to demonstrate how it would increase tourism.

Council directed staff to pursue this, and McMullen said they would begin by identifying potential projects.

Budget Guidance

Salvatore reiterated that the projected shortfall for FY 2010 was $2.2 million, which was still just an estimate based on a lot of unknowns (economy, state legislation, etc.). Staff had a list of some additional actions to reduce the deficit.

McMullen said he had two primary concerns. The first was that the deficit was not merely $2.2 million, because almost $1 million more in capital projects had been deferred from this year's PIP, which meant that was not being reinvested in the City. The second concern was that many of the steps taken to date affected employees, and he was concerned about how much more the City could do before morale became a real problem, and the City would come out of the tough economy losing all its good employees. He said he was making the plea for Council to consider some type of millage increase while the City weathered the bad economy.

Logsdon said everything done to date had been painful, but he was reluctant to have a millage increase. He said that it was really the same thing being done in the private sector. While he acknowledged that at some point the citizens would have to feel some of the pain, they were already feeling it. He said there were other things he had not seen, including an across the board cut in employee salaries, an across the board cut in Council salaries (delay 2010 increase by one to two years). Meeker confirmed the current Council could delay the start of the increase. Sturbaum said he would like the issue to come back to Council about deferring the salary increases. He said he also supported looking at a millage increase.

Sturbaum and Logsdon asked to see options – a 1% millage increase, as well as what savings would be achieved by reducing or eliminating the 401(a) match. Boone asked what additional hiring freezes were being considered, and McMullen said he continued to evaluate positions as they came vacant. He said they were still filling public safety positions, but all others were looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Plunkett asked when the last millage rate was implemented, and Salvatore said it went up 0.25 mills in 2006.

Salvatore said he felt the City was really feeling the impact of public safety increases that had been made without corresponding millage increases. McMullen said he had consistently calculated the costs of public safety staffing increases and asked for the corresponding millage increase. Plunkett also noted that no millage increase was ever enacted by the preceding Council for the Library expansion.

Haddix said he was in agreement with McMullen and did not see away around some type of tax increase, but felt a pay cut across the board would be very damaging. He asked to see alternatives for a quarter and half mill increase.

Plunkett asked what the additional proposed changes added up to, saying it was not $2.2 million. McMullen confirmed this, and said enacting all of the items still left about $1 million to be covered by fund balance or millage increase. McMullen said that the City could reasonably use $600,000 to $700,000 to get through the current economic crisis, but relying totally on fund balance was deferring a lot of items and would ultimately bankrupt the City within a few years.

Haddix asked for a pessimistic picture if the economy remained bad through 2010. McMullen said he and Salvatore had presented the pessimistic picture.

Boone asked about the employee survey on the 25% pay cuts. Salvatore noted that the last salary study was done in 2001, so the City did not know precisely where it stood with the current salaries, and imposing the cuts could incur significant costs in the future to bring the salary schedule back in line.

Plunkett asked that, if staff looked at pay cuts, they include looking at a sliding scale with higher cuts from the higher paid employees.

Eiswerth, Gaddo, and Clark expressed concern about salary decreases on top of the increase in insurance costs, elimination of any salary increases in FY 2010, and elimination of the 401(a) contribution.

Boone said he did not want to lose employees, and felt some level of tax increase might be appropriate. Haddix asked to see the effective pay cuts to date based on the actions taken. Logsdon said he wanted to see all the options available. Boone asked for figures on the impact of a quarter, half, and full mill would be on a $250,000 home.

Sue Memmer addressed Council and said she did not want to see public safety take pay cuts, and she would like to see them exempt. She also said if the City could not make Kedron work, the City should sell it.

Art Bernard, employee, opposed the pay cuts, saying everyone needed to share in the costs of the amenities people here wanted.

Robert Brown said only government had the option to raise rates without losing "customers." The private sector had to make hard decisions to balance their budgets, and they did not arbitrarily raise rates because they could lose customers. While some tax increase might be necessary to maintain the minimum level of service, it should not be excessive. Government was in business to provide services, not jobs, and the City needed to evaluate the services needed and wanted and then determine what it took to provide those services. He said even Police and Fire needed to be looked at for potential waste. Brown also asked if businesses hiring off-duty police officers paid for use of the police vehicles. Staff said no, and Brown said there was an expense to the City for those actions.

Theo Scott said he chose Peachtree City for his retirement and had been very pleased here. He said he was bothered by saying the City was not going to look at Public Safety when there had already been cuts there due to some of the things already enacted. The Library was very busy. If Council was going to retain the Peachtree City he had chosen, then Council could not rule out a millage increase.

Aguayo said all the citizens had experienced cuts in retirement funds and investment, as well as pay cuts, layoffs, etc. No one wanted to see taxes increased, but no one wanted to see the quality of life in the City degraded. She agreed that employees could not be expected to continue to take cuts and also be expected to continue providing the same levels of service.

Rutherford asked Council to make decisions based on the good of the City, not because of what might happen in the November election or what 15 people said at a meeting.

Logsdon noted that everyone would be seeing about a $250 tax increase because the state had discontinued the Homeowner Tax Relief Grant.

The Retreat adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Betsy Tyler, Acting City Clerk

Harold Logsdon, Mayor