

**MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY OF KENNESAW
Council Chambers
(2529 J.O. Stephenson Avenue, Kennesaw, GA 30144)
May 10, 2025
8:00 AM**

Present	Mayor Derek Easterling Mayor Pro Tem Pat Ferris Councilmember Madelyn Orochena Councilmember Tracey Viars Councilmember Antonio Jones Councilmember Anthony Gutierrez City Clerk Lea Alvarez Georgia Municipal Association Consultant Michael McPherson
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1. Call to Order

Mayor Easterling called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m.

He opened the meeting up by thanking everyone for attending and how he was looking forward to an open discussion on key goals and visions.

2. Roles and Responsibilities: Presentation by GMA Member Services Consultant, Michael McPherson

Georgia Municipal Association Member Services Consultant Michael McPherson introduced himself to the Mayor and Council. Mr. McPherson has 27 years of state and local experience, including working for the City of Roswell and the General Assembly. He began working for the Georgia Municipal Association in 2013 on the Government Relations team. Mr. McPherson noted he craves the types of opportunities like he has today to make stronger municipal teams.

He began his presentation by touching on the roles of elected officials. As a governing body, their main focus should be community building and achieving its broad-based strategic goals. He contrasted it with the role of staff, which is modernizing and shaping the organization so that it can be responsive to the City's goals.

Mr. McPherson encouraged the Council to speak to each other more frequently to learn each other's perspectives. His keys to developing a better relationship begin with understanding the City's form of government. Councilmember Gutierrez asked whether it was common that the Council must speak to Department Heads through the City Manager. Mr. McPherson responded that it is common for cities with a Council-Manager form of government.

Councilmember Jones noted his frustration with the fact that he thought he would have more time to figure out how staff worked and get a behind-the-scenes look in order to

better understand processes. Mr. McPherson stated that the orientation process for the newly elected needed to improve to give them a run-down on departments and their respective capacities. The Council agreed.

Mayor Easterling recessed the meeting at 9:15 a.m.

Mayor Easterling called the meeting to order again at 9:30 a.m.

Mr. McPherson discussed today's challenges for local government, including changes to technology, being closest to the people, the nature of intergovernmental relationships, cynicism among the public, and division between the Council and the public about what the role of local government should be in their community.

He then transitioned to organizational culture. Since the elected are at the top, everything they do and say can have an impact on staff. He emphasized that staff morale should be at the top of their minds at all times. Mr. McPherson stated that the Council wants an organizational culture based on getting the job done and accountability. Further, they want to build trust as it is critical. Ultimately, management must set the tone at the top. He shared numerous ways in which an organization must develop trust: not interfering with others' roles; making sure written protocols were in place; understanding "good governance;" supporting good management, including effective, efficient, accountable, and equitable delivery of services; insuring a sense of respect for the public and openness to public input; a willingness to move on key issues; operating under a comprehensive strategic business/planning process; respecting each other; holding honest and open communication; agreeing on roles and responsibilities; demonstrating a strong commitment to work collaboratively; and following through with commitment to hold regular and timely reviews and feedback on programs or services.

Mr. McPherson facilitated an exercise called, "Mine Field," where one councilmember is blindfolded and another gives directions to help them avoid running into any chairs.

3. As a Councilmember:

- A. What is my vision for the City?
- B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision?
- C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion?
- D. How do I learn best?
- E. What is next for me?

Mayor Easterling asked each Councilmember the above-listed questions:

Pat Ferris

A. What is my vision for the City?: Mayor Pro Tem Ferris' vision for the City is growth

and stability. He sees the City reaching its potential growth in 2030-2035.

B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision? He mentioned a couple of projects he believed had advanced his vision for the City, including the Inclusive Playground at Swift-Cantrell Park.

C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion? One of Mayor Pro Tem Ferris' passions is finance. When he first sat on the Council, the City had a Tax Allocation Note (TAN). At that time, the Council discussed building up its reserves and getting rid of the TAN. He said the City had accomplished that. Further, he loves the Kennesaw City Cemetery and has truly enjoyed being a part of it over the last 7–8 years.

D. How do I learn best? Mayor Pro Tem Ferris shared he learns best by reading and through visuals.

E. What is next for me? He emphasized that what is next for him is double retirement!

Antonio Jones

A. What is my vision for the City? Councilmember Jones' vision for the City is a lot like its tagline: Honoring Our Heritage; Forging Our Future. He likes to see Kennesaw growing as a city with many cultures and loves living in an area where everyone gets along.

B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision? To achieve that vision, his top three projects have been paid paternity leave for staff, having Juneteenth and Veterans Day as city-observed holidays, and improvements to the front of City Hall, which included more ADA parking.

C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion? Councilmember Jones' passion is to help people. It gives him great enjoyment to see if the City can make someone's life a little easier.

D. How do I learn best? He learns best through visuals and by being hands-on.

E. What is next for me? Councilmember Jones shared what is next for him is a little girl!

Anthony Gutierrez

A. What is my vision for the City? Councilmember Gutierrez shared his vision for the City is continued progress and modernization. He enjoyed seeing the amphitheater and the Kennesaw Public Safety Facility come to life. He noted that with growth in our population comes big changes for which we will need to plan.

B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision? He desires projects that focus on making the City more of a place to reside in instead of just living. He wants to see the City invest in small businesses, farmers markets, concert series - things that will expand upon and benefit the community as a whole.

C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion? Further, he is passionate about investing in services for people.

D. How do I learn best? Councilmember Gutierrez learns best by sitting down with people and having face-to-face conversations. Additionally, he enjoys retreats like this.

E. What is next for me? What is next for him is getting his EMT-B certification.

Madelyn Orochena

A. What is my vision for the City? Councilmember Orochena's vision for the City is

that our neighborhoods are close communities with people walking around. She wants to see a downtown as diverse as the people who live here with a variety of things to do, eat, and shop. Furthermore, she wants streets that feel cozy, comfortable, and safe.

B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision? Projects that will help achieve her vision include arts and culture in the downtown area that will serve community members, encouraging foot traffic, and prioritizing pedestrian safety. Ultimately, enhancements to quality of life.

C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion? She emphasized her passion for the arts and the impact it has on people's lives. It provides the opportunity for shared experiences.

D. How do I learn best? Councilmember Orochena noted that she learns best by observing, listening, and engaging in discussions.

E. What is next for me? What is next for her is always changing. Right now, she has a very present-day focus and takes it one mile at a time. She works to stay on track and focuses on what she can do, and in all the craziness, stays true to herself.

Tracey Viars

A. What is my vision for the City? Councilmember Viars sees the City of Kennesaw similarly to Councilmember Jones. We are going from old Kennesaw to new Kennesaw, and we are somewhere in the middle. She is in a fortunate place as a commercial relator and in the hospitality industry, as she gets a lot of feedback. Councilmember Viars is looking forward to developing our own style. She is tired of getting compared to other cities. Structurally, the City of Kennesaw is different from any other city, especially when it comes to our downtown.

B. How do my projects/objectives/goals help achieve this vision? She shared several projects she has been a part of that have helped bring her vision to life, including the amphitheater, the Kennesaw Public Safety Facility, and the Inclusive Playground at Swift-Cantrell Park.

C. Where do I fit in? What is my passion? She is passionate about being a part of everyone's story. It is part of her job to be an ambassador for the City.

D. How do I learn best? She learns best by hearing input from other people.

E. What is next for me? Councilmember Viars plans on wrapping up her political career and hopes to continue to volunteer for the City.

4. Creating a Shared Vision

Mayor Easterling concluded the session by saying that today was about the sum of them all. He shared that the Council's time is the most expensive thing they own, so he is very grateful they are spending their Saturday morning together for their City.

5. Adjournment

Mayor Easterling adjourned the meeting at 10:58 a.m.

[MIN_SIGNATURES]