

**MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CITY OF KENNESAW
Embassy Suites by Hilton
Atlanta Kennesaw Town Center
(620 Chastain Road, Kennesaw, GA 30144)
May 22, 2026
9:00 AM**

Present	Mayor Derek Easterling Mayor Pro Tem Antonio Jones Councilmember Madelyn Orochena Councilmember Tracey Viars Councilmember Jonathon Bothers Councilmember Anthony Gutierrez-Leon Deputy City Clerk Nicholas Simpson City Manager Jeff Drobney
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1. 9:00 a.m. Welcome - Mayor Easterling & Michael McPherson

Mayor Derek Easterling and retreat facilitator Michael McPherson from the Georgia Municipal Association kicked off the retreat with opening remarks. Mayor Easterling began with the question: How do we work together so that we can focus on the needs of the City of Kennesaw? He stated the City's current population of 39,984 and reminded Council that they must serve the needs of the entire city. The Mayor questioned whether each council member's respective goals worked against achieving the Council's collective goals. The Mayor feels that, although council members may disagree on certain issues, they remain very collegial. According to Mayor Easterling, for the Council to achieve its goals for the City, it must trust city staff's assistance in meeting Council objectives. Each council member wields power with their vote and staff is readily available to help make informed decisions on important municipal matters. The Mayor also asked his colleagues "what's best for the city of Kennesaw and how can I best support staff."

Mr. McPherson revealed that he has hosted retreats with the Kennesaw City Council in the past. He noted that past councils were used to voting in a solid block, but that may not be the case moving forward with the current Council. McPherson commented that, as the Council changes with new people and personalities, it is important for council members to understand their colleagues. The overarching goal is not to change peoples' minds, but how they operate.

2. 9:05 a.m. - Ice Breaker

Council participated in an "ice breaker".

Facilitator McPherson asked council members what they would build in the City of Kennesaw if they could build anything they wanted. He also asked what they would

destroy in the City of Kennesaw if they could destroy anything they wanted. Each member provided candid responses.

3. 9:15 a.m. - Role of the Facilitator/ Ground Rules

Facilitator Michael McPherson gave an overview of his role as a facilitator and explained the "ground rules of engagement" for the retreat.

4. 9:20 a.m. - Perception

Retreat Facilitator Michael McPherson spoke with Council about their perception in the community and their perception of each other. Council members discussed recent requests for improvements to Woodland Acres Park and Pine Mountain Park, and the need to serve all residents in the City of Kennesaw.

5. 9:40 a.m. - Roles and Responsibilities

Facilitator Michael McPherson discussed the role of the Council in municipal government. He stressed that the City Manager must protect city staff by providing a clear vision for the city and managing operations in an orderly and coordinated fashion. City staff ultimately reports to the City Manager, not the City Manager and Council.

6. 10:00 a.m. - Break

-BREAK-

7. 10:15 a.m. - Trust and Understanding

Facilitator McPherson asked each Council member how he or she could maintain trust with the rest of the group.

Council member Jonathon Bothers responded that collaboration is key and no one should take anything personally.

Council member Madelyn Orochena responded that it is important not to take anything personally despite having differing opinions on issues.

8. 10:40 a.m. - Communication

Council members discussed the steps they would take to bring a policy concept from an idea to implementation. They individually highlighted what they felt were challenges they encountered when trying to pursue their policy goals and objectives.

9. 11:00 a.m. - Exercise

The Council participated in a team-building exercise led by Facilitator Michael McPherson.

10. 11:25 a.m. - Leadership and Creating a Culture of Accountability

Council members discussed the concept of leadership, the characteristics of a good leader and the need to hold each other accountable as they discharge their elected

duties.

11. 11:45 a.m. - Break

-BREAK-

12. 12:00 p.m. - Working Lunch

-WORKING LUNCH-

Council discussed establishing individual goals and priorities and finding the best ways to develop a consensus for ideas and solutions among the group.

13. 1:00 p.m. - 3 Priorities

Retreat facilitator Michael McPherson asked council members to name three of their individual objectives.

Council Member Tracey Viars

1. Streamlining the application and permitting process for businesses
2. Reform the City's historic preservation regulation
3. Sucession planning

Council Member Madelyn Orochena

1. Pedestrian safeguards for the Sardis Street Extension
2. Creating an arts space in the city
3. Passive play area at Depot Park

Mayor Pro Tem Jones

1. \$400 monthly daycare costs for employees
2. Solar efficient homes
3. Pedestrian safety

Council Member Anthony Gutierrez-Leon

1. Data center ban
2. Combat blight
3. Strengthen code enforcement

Council Member Jonathon Bothers

1. Establish city arts
2. Employee pay increase
3. Traffic congestion along Kennesaw Due West Road

Mayor Derek Easterling

1. Finalizing the city's comprehensive plan
2. Succession planning
3. Setting expectations

14. 1:20 p.m. - Exercise

-GROUP EXERCISE-

15. 1:45 p.m. - How the Priorities Stack Up

Facilitator McPherson and the Council discussed the feasibility of individual council member priorities and the need to include city staff for research and recommendations on important budget and policy decisions.

16. Video

Facilitator McPherson showed a brief team-building video.

17. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'NS', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Nicholas Simpson, Deputy City Clerk