

Canton, Georgia

*110 Academy Street
Canton, Georgia 30114*



Minutes - Final - Final

Friday, December 12, 2025

8:30 AM

City Hall

110 Academy Street

Year in Review Work Session

City Council

1. Call to Order

The Year in Review Work Session was called to order by Mayor Grant.

Members Present:

*Mayor Bill Grant
Mayor Pro Tem Shawn Tolan
Councilmember Sandy McGrew
Councilmember Dwayne Waterman
Councilmember Travis Johnson
Councilmember Farris Yawn
Mr. Billy Peppers, City Manager
Mr. Nathan Ingram, Assistant City Manager
Mr. Bobby Dyer, City Attorney
Mr. Marty Ferrell, Police Chief
Mr. Eric Fortner, Director of Building and Safety Services
Mr. Kevin Turner, Community Development Director
Mr. Tyler Peoples, City Planner
Mr. Jakob Allen, City Planner
Mr. Ken Patton, Housing Initiatives Director
Ms. Bethany Watson, City Engineer
Mr. Nick Wilson, Land Development Administrator
Ms. Lauren Johnson, Communications Manager
Ms. Aundi Lesley, Economic Development Manager
Mr. Ryan Luckett, Finance Director
Ms. Amy Thomas, Human Resources Manager
Mr. Scott Hooper, Public Works Director
Mr. Adam Dodson, Parks and Recreation Manager
Ms. Kelly Pendley, Operations Director
Mr. Mike Morgan, Information Technology Director
Mr. Russell Martin, IT Systems Analyst
Ms. Annie Fortner, City Clerk*

Absent:

Councilmember Bryan Roach

2. Overview of Work Session

City Manager Billy Peppers stated that each department will have around 15 minutes to review the accomplishments of 2025 and to provide details of upcoming projects in 2026.

3. 2025 Review & 2026 Outlook

A. Building & Safety Services - Eric Fortner

Director of Building and Safety Services Eric Fortner provided the following data and accomplishments from 2025:

- 13,500 Inspections YTD*
 - o 1,500 commercial inspections*
 - o 11,300 residential inspections*
 - o 800 annual fire inspections (commercial, schools, manufacturing)*

- *56 pre-construction meetings*
- *97% of fire suppression systems in the City in routine compliance*
- *8 new emergency responder radio coverage systems installed*
- *New fire watch QR code system*
- *Responded to 70 fire hazard related concerns*

2026 projects to watch include the replacement of Cherokee High School, continued construction of various projects at Northside Hospital Cherokee, and industrial projects like CBBE at Canton Corporate Park, Becker HQ, and Bluff's Corporate Park. Mr. Fortner discussed a City-wide risk reduction program through assessments related to commercial businesses, multi-family buildings, and essential facilities.

B. Communications - Lauren Johnson

Communications Manager Lauren Johnson provided the following data and accomplishments from 2025:

- *Social Communication Growth*
 - o *2K new Facebook followers (total 24K)*
 - o *10K Instagram followers*
 - o *348 new LinkedIn followers*
 - o *5.3K new Explore Canton Facebook followers*
 - o *2.9K new Explore Canton Instagram followers*
- *Routine communications*
 - o *Annual Year in Review*
 - o *Monthly & Mid-monthly Newsletters*
 - o *44 tourism blogs*
 - o *50 videos produced*
- *Events Support*
 - o *State of the City Address*
 - o *Multicultural Festival (5th year)*
 - o *Teen Job Fair*
 - o *Groundbreakings/Ribbon Cuttings*
 - o *Town Hall Meetings (3)*
 - o *Georgia Cities Week*
 - o *150 events/activities photographed/videoed*

New initiatives for 2026 include Explore Canton Mini-Visitors Center at Lakepoint Sports, new billboard campaign, ad transitions from fall/winter to spring/summer, platform upgrade for website to Granicus' Service Cloud, and Strategic Marketing Plan RFP for Explore Canton.

C. Community Development - Kevin Turner

Community Development Director Kevin Turner provided the following data and accomplishments from 2025:

- *Expanded Historic District and Implementation of Residential Reviews*
- *Impact Fee Methodology Update*
- *Updated Administrative Processes for Design Review*
- *ADU Regulation Updates*
- *Zoning Map & Table Update/Simplification*
- *New Hires:*
 - o *Tyler Peoples, City Planner*
 - o *Jakob Allen, City Planner*

Mr. Turner also provided the following data highlights:

- *Code Enforcement*
 - o *270 summons issued*
 - o *2,607 inspections/violations*
- *Permitting*
 - o *3,017 permits issued*
 - o *1,798 business licenses processed*
- *Zoning Reviews*
 - o *446 building permits*
 - o *35 land disturbance permits*
 - o *19 zoning certifications*
 - o *40 historic preservation certificates*
 - o *7 variances (+2 administrative)*
 - o *43 design review cases*
 - o *106 sign permits (+46 temporary)*
 - o *384 zoning inspections*
 - o *8 rezonings/CUPs/Master plan*
 - o *2 annexations*

2026 projects include Impact Fee implementation, Unified Development Code update, transition from GICH program graduation, and working with the County on the Pea Ridge plan.

D. Economic Development - Aundi Lesley

Economic Development Manager Aundi Lesley provided the following data and accomplishments from 2025:

- *Business Development*
 - o *National League of Cities SCEI Grant and Bootcamp Program*
 - o *Partnership with UGA's Small Business Development Center*
 - *SBDC Introduction to Business Courses (Spanish)*
 - *Doing Business in Georgia*
 - o *Partnership with Kennesaw State University*
 - *Non-profit Education Workshop*
 - o *Partnership with Reinhardt University*
 - *Workforce Development Panel*
 - o *Partnership with Chamber of Commerce*
 - *Cyber security training; Connect Canton initiative*
 - *Leadership Symposium; Women in Business*
- *Business Survey*
- *Business Recruitment & Expansion*
 - o *Partnership with Cherokee Office of Economic Development*
 - *Industry expansion assistance to CBBE at Canton Corporate Park*
 - *Existing Industry Incentive Tax Abatement Program*
 - *Prospect assistance and responding to RFPs*
 - *LEAP trip to Greenville, SC*
 - *2026 Advanced Business Series*
- *Major Project Support*
 - o *Canton Village Shopping Center closeout and assistance*
 - o *Raices y Negocios and Hispanic business community outreach*
 - o *Hotel site meetings*
 - o *New special event function; hired Anijah Jones*
- *Downtown Development*

- o *Downtown Hotel RFP through Horwath HTL; site visits*
- o *District on Etowah construction*
- o *Continued tenant buildout at The Mill on Etowah*
 - *Main Street*
- o *12 Signature Events*
- o *Georgia Exceptional Main Street Designation*
 - *Historic Canton Theatre*
- o *Fox Theatre Institute Renovation Grant*
- o *Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers*
- o *Canton City Limits*
- o *Various movie/film series*
- o *Peaberry Film Festival*

2026 projects include continued industry expansion at Bluffs and Canton Corporate, new UGA SBDC Spanish Series, 2026 Advanced Business Series, fully implement Special Event Fund, use survey data for impact, and major corridor projects.

E. Engineering - Bethany Watson

City Engineer Bethany Watson provided the following data and accomplishments from 2025:

- *Transportation*
 - o *Downtown Master Plan adoption*
 - o *Hickory Flat Highway Gateway adoption*
 - o *Reservoir Drive at Reinhardt College Parkway signal*
 - o *Design of Canton Creek Pedestrian Bridge*
 - o *Updated Transportation Projects for Impact Fee*
 - o *TSPLOST Approval and project list*
 - o *ROW Acquisition for West Main*
 - o *Design of Prominence Point Signal*
- *Land Development*
 - o *New Land Development Administrator*
- *Hired Nick Wilson*
- *Water & Wastewater*
 - o *Brown Industrial Booster Pump Station commissioned*
 - o *Design of Ridge Pine Elevated Tank*
 - o *Design of SR20/I-575 Water Main Replacement Project*
 - o *Water Treatment Plan Feasibility Study*
 - o *Odor Control at Bluffs Parkway*
 - o *Continued WPCP Expansion*

2026 Transportation projects include:

- *Canton Creek Pedestrian Bridge Completion*
- *ROW & Construction at Prominence Pt. Signal*
- *Bidding & Construction West Main*
- *Bidding & Construction River Mill Pedestrian Bridge & Trail Connector*
- *Downtown to Mill Improvement Designs*
- *Downtown Delivery Zones*
- *SR140 Continuation*
- *Design for Canton Creek & Marietta Road*
- *Railroad Street/Waleska Road Signal Design*
- *Cannon Park Reversal*

2026 Water & Wastewater projects include:

- *Complete Raw Water Intake improvements*
- *Great Sky odor control design and construction*
- *Water Master Plan Update*
- *WPCP Upgrade completed; membranes and dryer system*
- *Water Treatment Plant Filter Rehab*
- *GDOT utility relocation projects ongoing*
- *Ridge Pine Elevated Tank construction*
- *SR20/I-575 Water Main Replacement*
- *Waste Water Master Plan Update*

F. Finance - Ryan Lockett

Finance Director Ryan Lockett provided the following accomplishments from 2025:

- *Completed FY2024 Audit with no findings*
- *Completed FY2025 Budget process; historic tax cut and \$42M capital investments*
- *Revamped Special Event funding structure for alignment*
- *Process improvements for P-Card and Bank Reconciliation*
- *Expanded fraud prevention services, such as positive pay*
- *Transitioned financial management software to cloud environment*
- *Secured financing for Downtown Fire Station rehab*
- *Hired Ryan Lockett as Finance Director*

2026 projects include:

- *Upgrades to Canton's Financial Management Software*
- *P-Card Program*
- *Recruit new Procurement Manager Position; review policies*
- *Finalize FY2025 Audit*
- *FY2027 Budget Process*
- *Review other financial policies for updates*
- *Financing for North Street Gateway Project*
- *Implement Utility Customer Portal/Dashboard*
- *Establish TSPLOST Account*

G. Human Resources - Amy Thomas

Human Resources Manager Amy Thomas provided the following accomplishments from 2025:

- *Launched BambooHR—fully digital HR system*
 - o *Paperless application process for new hires*
 - o *Paperless onboarding system*
 - o *Paperless annual employee goal-setting and supervisory reviews*
 - o *Centralized communications for internal HR communications*
 - o *Centralized online record-keeping for employee information*
- *Northside Hospital-Cherokee Health Fair*
- *Lunch & Learn Sessions*
- *Leadership Training Series (7 weeks, 15 employees)*
- *Service Awards Luncheon*
- *Duolingo (20 employees)*
- *Hired Nichole Parks as Human Resources Coordinator*
- *Onboarded*
 - o *18 new full-time employees*

- ☐ 12 filled vacancies
- ☐ 6 newly formed positions
- o 2 interns
- o 3 new seasonal employees
- Staff count 145 (Dec. 1)
- 2025 turnover rate 5.7% (includes retirement)

2026 projects include:

- Complete a rewrite of the City's Personnel Manual for easier understanding and to update policies
- Partnership with AmRet Investment Consultants to review the City's investment line-up with MissionSquare
- Implement a new Time & Attendance software to replace the current Time Clocks Plus

H. Information Technology - Mike Morgan

Information Technology Director Mike Morgan provided the following accomplishments from 2025:

- Implemented a network infrastructure refresh project starting with a new Storage Array
- Initial Flock Camera project rollout completed
- Transitioned Canton Police Department to AT&T FirstNet
- Upgrade Canton Theatre network
- Integrated Records Management Software for Canton Police Department with Cherokee County Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)
- Installed new Core switches to the network
- City staff have received more than 2M emails in 2025

2026 projects include:

- Continuing network refresh projects
- Install ESXI virtual server hosts
- Continue upgrade to Water Plant system and fiber
- Continue cybersecurity training

I. Police - Marty Ferrell

Police Chief Marty Ferrell provided the following accomplishments and projects from 2025:

- Launch of Canton Ambassadors for Public Safety (CAPS) Program
- o Secured funding (February 2025)
- o Hired 4 CAPS and spent 8-weeks training
- o Leased and equipped 4 CAPS units
- o Immediate reduction in Patrol workload
- ☐ Average 300 calls per month
- ☐ Average 50 reports per month
- Phone call requests
- Walk-in requests
- Street hazards
- Stranded motorists
- Private property incidents
- Began research and laying groundwork for a Canton Police Foundation
- Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Integration
- o Integrated into Police Vehicles in March 2025 and fully online April 2025

- o Allows for the in-vehicle display and review of details for calls for service, research call history, self-initiate, silent dispatch
- o Allows supervisors to better allocate resources during periods of high call volume
 - Establish a Co-Responder program with Highland Rivers
- o Funding approved, waiting on clinician to be hired
- Completed firearms auction on inventory held in property and evidence for previously adjudicated cases
- Partnered with Cherokee Sheriff's Office on Real Time Intelligence Center (RTIC) for increased crime intelligence
- FULLY STAFFED
- Completed 100% review of policies
- o 109 Policies reviewed and edited, signed by Chief
- o 7 policies suspended or merged to reduce redundancy
- Facility Upgrades
- o Improved training classrooms
- o Upgraded kitchen/dining area
- o Chief's Conference Room & Emergency Operations Center
- o CID Conference Room
- o Records Unit
- o Front Lobby
- o New Etowah Room
- o In-House Gym with Chris Conte Memorial Grant

2026 projects include:

- Increase Drug Crimes Enforcement and CMANS Cooperation
- Establish a Canton Police Foundation
- Introduction of a Strategic Engagement Officer
- Co-Responder Program Launch
- Increase hosted training
- Implement Taser 10
- Introduce Sabre Projective Launcher Devices
- Increased Crime Intelligence Analysis

Councilmember Yawn left at this time.

J. Public Works - Scott Hooper

Public Works Director Scott Hooper provided the following accomplishments from 2025:

- Sidewalk projects at Laurel Canyon & Jarvis Street; East Main St starting mid-Dec.
- Right of Way Maintenance Contract with TriScape for I-575 Exits, Riverstone, Reinhardt College Parkway
- Jarvis Street stormwater project
- ARC Green Communities Certification (Bronze)
- Launched Public Works Work Order System for internal tracking through GIS/InterDev
- Clean out of Downtown Fire Station
- Completed 2024 MS4 Reporting
- All Christmas pole lights were restrung and upgraded to LED lighting
- Partnered with Schneider Electric on:
 - o HVAC upgrades at City Hall, Canton Theatre, Police/Municipal Court, and Public Works

- o Solar tree installation at Etowah River Park
- o Solar picnic table installation at Heritage Park
- o Solar array installation at City Hall
- Roadway surface inventory and analysis
- Storm clean up/tree removal
- Paved Roadways
- High Friction Surface Treatment at Great Sky & Laurel Canyon Parkways

The following were accomplishments from Parks and Recreation in 2025:

- Harmon Park
- o New HVAC (restrooms and concessions)
- o Electrical upgrades (scoreboard and lights)
- o Whitebox of office space
- o Remodel concessions/staffed seasonally
- o Field rehabilitations/laser leveling
- Field rehabs at Boling Park
- Park in South Canton
- o Designs completed by TSW
- o Project bid and awarded to Diversified of Georgia
- o Groundbreaking/notice to proceed issued

2026 projects include:

- Demolition of Canton Village/Marietta Road properties
- Pavement Assessment and Inventory
- o Complete AI Pavement Assessment Program
- o Launch paving maintenance program
- o Sidewalk Assessment program launch
- o Sign Assessment program launch
- Safety Action Plan Grant
- o Laurel Canyon Parkway Guardrail repairs/replacement
- o 16 solar-based pedestrian signs installed in City
- Sidewalk repairs
- o East Main (40 panels, 4 new ADA ramps)
- o River Green (22 panels)
- 2026 Right of Way Maintenance RFP
- Police/Municipal Court roof replacement
- Canton Theatre restroom remodel
- I-575 High Mast Light maintenance
- ADA Audit and Transition Plan
- Signage & Trail mapping Plan
- Improve park support features (shade, water, seating)
- Park at South Canton Construction
- Add new recreational programs
- Evaluate Boling Park Tennis to Pickle Ball conversion

K. Administration - Nathan Ingram

Assistant City Manager Nathan Ingram provided the following accomplishments from 2025:

- 101 public meetings in 2025
- 1,275 JustFOIA requests (Dec. 2)
- 4,804 ballots cast (21.09% turnout)
- Council Retreat to Lake Lanier/Gainesville/Sugar Hill
- Intergovernmental Agreements

- o TSPLOST
- o Tax Allocation District with County
- o North Street Gateway Project with County & DDA
- o Downtown Fire Station with County & CBA
- o Elections
- o LMIG Joint Resurfacing
- o Cherokee County Local Emergency Operations Plan
- o Sheriff's Office Intelligence as a Service Software Partnership
- o Regional Land Bank Authority
 - Partnered with DDA on:
- o Cherokee North resident relocation assistance program
- o Purchase of 301 and 351 Marietta Road for gateway project
- o Vacated Canton Village Shopping Center/abatement
 - Partnered with Cherokee County and municipalities for SS4A and Vision Zero Commitment Transportation Program
 - Negotiated residential sanitation contract renewal with WastePro with no current increase and 2.5% cap on future years
 - Finalized golf course appraisal and agreed to sales price
 - Conducted 16 staff huddles

2026 projects include:

- Negotiate IGAs to begin joint TSPLOST projects
- Finalize North Street Gateway Designs and begin demolition and construction
- Complete renovation of downtown fire station
- Launch of new Citizens Academy
- Launch of new Youth Academy/Council program
- Finalize sale of golf course
- Spring & Fall City Council Retreats

4. City Manager Comments

None

5. Closing - Mayor Grant

Mayor Grant thanked everyone for the hard work put into the past year. Mayor Grant requested that the PowerPoint provided be placed on the City's website and asked that everyone maintain focus and refer to the City's Roadmap so we can have a successful 2026. Mayor Grant noted that the State of the City Address will be given on January 29th.

6. Adjourn

Councilmember Waterman made a motion to adjourn. Councilmember Johnson seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Bill Grant, Mayor

Attest:

Annie Fortner, City Clerk

Dates Minutes Approved by Council