

Letter to Covington News published July 20, 2019

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to an article in your paper on July 6TH that quoted Mayor Johnston and some members of the Covington City Council as questioning the value of Newton County Tomorrow. From reading the article, it appears that some members of the Council don't know what NCT is or what it does. Hopefully, this brief summary will answer some of their questions.

WHAT IS NEWTON COUNTY TOMORROW?

Newton County Tomorrow (NCT) is a 501 c (3) non-profit incorporated in the state of Georgia. Its home base is The Center for Community Preservation, 2104 Washington Street, Covington. Its purpose is to improve the realm of government. It is governed by a board consisting of the Chairman of the Newton County Board of Commissioners, Mayors of six Newton County cities, the Superintendent of Newton County Public Schools, the Executive Director of the Newton County Water and Sewer Authority, the President of the Covington-Newton County Chamber of Commerce and eleven citizens who hold no elected or paid government position. It has won many awards, including a national award for its community work. (Companies and their employees looking for new locations notice such things).

WHAT HAS NCT DONE FOR COVINGTON?

The NCT board members and their organizations have done for Covington what Covington could not do for itself. And in the process saved the citizens of Covington more than \$500,000 in water system improvement costs. How? The state of Georgia offers incentives to communities that bring their water system up to a superior standard and then maintains it at that level. Covington is one of seven partners in the Newton County Consecutive Water System (an unusual arrangement) making it impossible for Covington to meet the standards alone.

Beginning in August 2010, NCT partners gathered at The Center and began the work to qualify Newton County and its municipalities for WaterFirst Certification. Two thousand participant hours were devoted to compiling data, attending meetings, traveling to other cities, preparing documents and making a final presentation to the Department of Community Affairs in November 2011.

Those 15 months of work paid off in 2012 when Newton County was the only county in the state (there are 159 counties in Georgia) to receive WaterFirst Certification. Seven Georgia cities received certification in 2012 and five of those are in Newton County. That certification earned Newton County and its cities a full one-point discount on water system loans – that is how Covington saved its citizens more than \$500,000.

WaterFirst has saved Newton County taxpayers many millions of dollars on water system improvements at Stanton Springs, Lake Varner, and elsewhere in the county. Re-certification of all county and municipal water systems is required every five years and NCT recently facilitated that re-certification.

During the recent Service Delivery Strategy negotiations, the mayors and city managers met at The Center and over a period of two hours found a number of areas of agreement that resulted in significant savings for all the cities.

WHY MEET AT THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION?

The Center was created with the support of the Arnold Fund. The interior was designed by Randy Vinson and is uniquely suited for community meetings. Its main room is a studio with modern audio and video equipment. It has room for large maps and photographs. It has private rooms for offices and a boardroom. Last November members of Leadership Georgia visited The Center and following a tour of the building, one member said, "I see why Facebook wanted to move here."

The Chamber of Commerce uses The Center to host a variety of meetings, including luncheons, an annual meet your legislators' breakfast, updates from local elected officials, and much more. Many community organizations use the building – more than 60 in the recent past – with many returning multiple times.

Federal, State, and private foundations look for evidence of collaboration when considering a community's request for grants. NCT is solid evidence of collaboration. It is a legal entity with a board of directors made up of local leaders with a permanent meeting location. NCT has served this community well and has the financial and leadership support of those who believe that communication, compromise, and collaboration is essential if a community genuinely wants to improve the quality of life for all its residents.

Jerry Roseberry
Mayor, City of Oxford
Chairman of Newton County Tomorrow