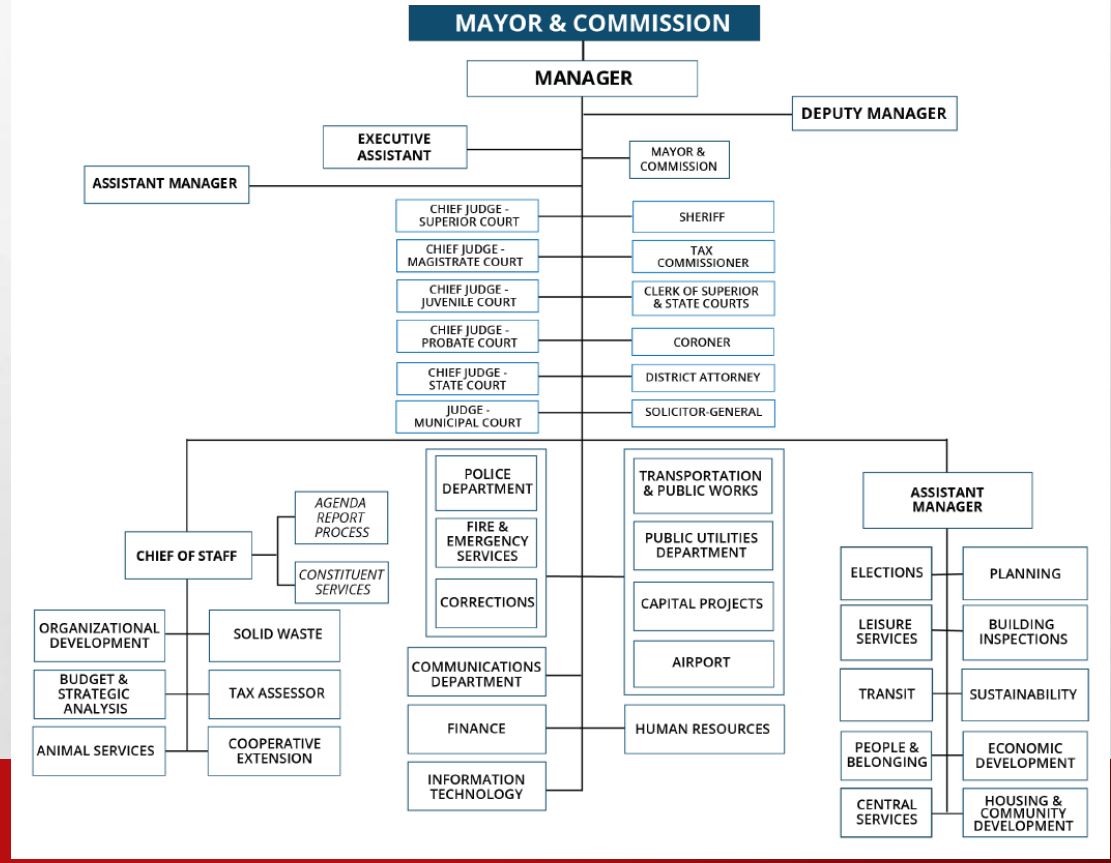
ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY CHILDCARE SUPPORT

MAYOR KELLY GIRTZ, JANUARY 2026

A BIT ABOUT ATHENS…

- CITY EST. 1806
- BECAME "UNIFIED GOVERNMENT" (CITY AND COUNTY MERGED) IN 1991
- APPROX. 135K RESIDENTS IN 2026
- $360MM ANNUAL BUDGET, 1800 EMPLOYEES
- "COUNCIL-MANAGER" FORM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT WITH MAYOR AND 10 MEMBER COMMISSION AS THE LEGISLATIVE UNIT



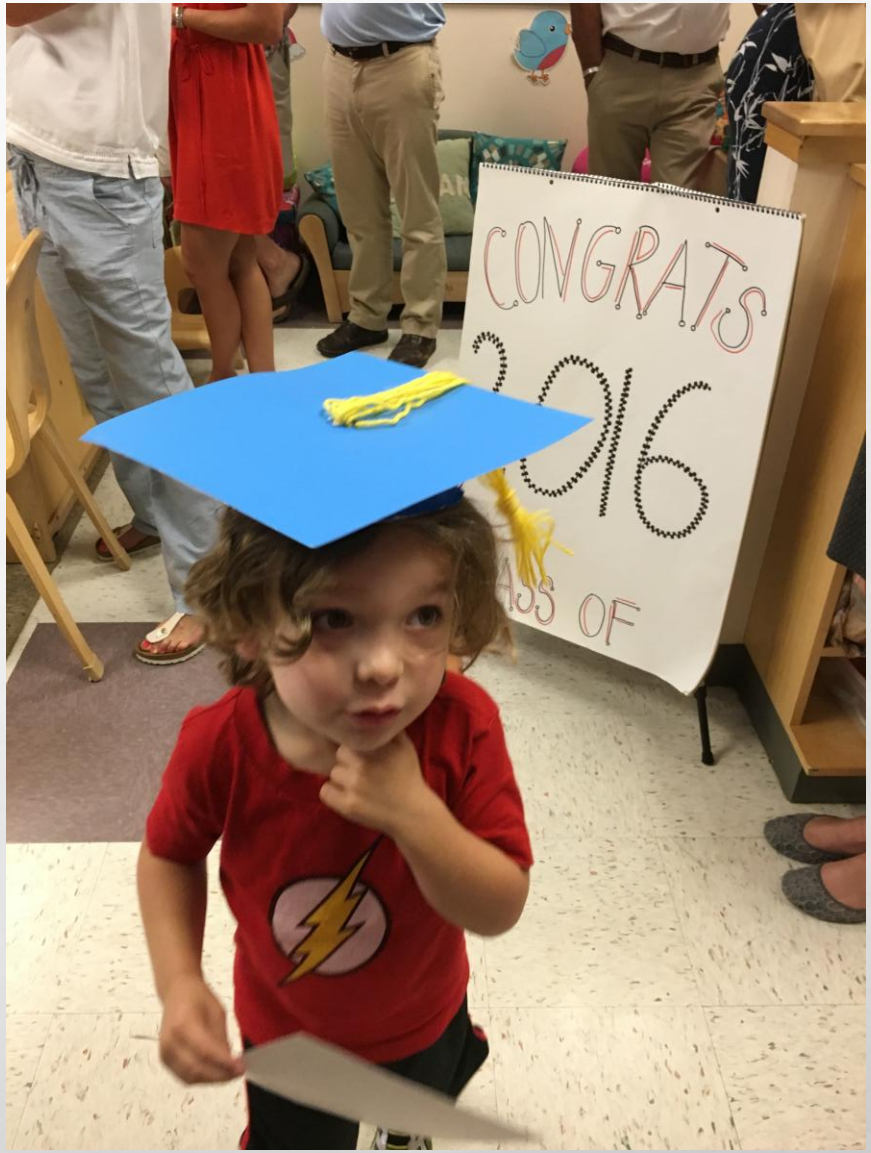


SUPPORTING CHILDCARE: THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

- HIRING AND KEEPING TALENT IS TOUGH
- LABOR COSTS ARE A CHALLENGE
- FACILITY COSTS ARE HIGH
- THIS MEANS COSTS TO FAMILIES IS CRA-ZY

A SYSTEMS CHALLENGE: NO SINGLE INSTITUTION "OWNS" CHILDCARE

- K12 SYSTEMS
- STATE REGULATORY AND COORDINATING BODIES
- NONPROFIT PROVIDERS
- FOR-PROFIT PROVIDERS: CENTERS AND IN-HOME CARE
- FAITH-BASED ENTITIES



SO WHY SHOULD A CITY CARE?

- IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR A STRONG EMPLOYMENT BASE
- IT CONTRIBUTES TO LONG-TERM COMMUNITY HEALTH, SAFETY, AND PROSPERITY

PREVIEW OF THE NEXT FEW MINUTES: WE'VE DONE SOME GOOD THINGS…BUT WE DEFINITELY DON'T HAVE THIS STUFF ALL FIGURED OUT

A CITY CAN CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPACE

- BOTH THE VOTER APPROVED PROJECT LANGUAGE FOR OUR NEW ARENA AND FOR OUR NEW MUNICIPAL FACILITY EXPLICITLY ALLOWED FOR CHILDCARE SPACE.
- THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN AT THE ARENA, BUT COULD HAPPEN AT THE MUNICIPAL FACILITY
- BUYING DOWN THE CAPITAL COST OF FACILITIES LOWERS FAMILIES PRICE TAG



01: Facilities Space Modernization Project

Last Content Update: Tuesday, August 27, 2024

Project Statement:

This project will provide funding for land acquisition, design, construction, and/or equipping of public/governmental use facilities and/or renovations, improvements, additions to, and equipping of existing facilities so as to provide expanded modern space for community, governmental, and judicial functions currently provided at the existing historic Courthouse and annex. Depending upon costs and funding availability, this new space will provide approximately 142,000 square feet of building space for community functions currently provided at the existing historic Courthouse and annex plus space for additional courts; alternative courts; separate holding space for juvenile detainees; separate travel spaces for visitors, inmates, and judicial staff; and other related functions such as determined to be necessary for an effective and modern judicial space. This project will provide funding for the renovation of the existing historic Courthouse and annex into a facility for governmental operations and/or other uses benefiting the Unified Government and/or community, which may also include child care and/or the use of any unused space for commercial and/or retail use. Depending upon costs and funding availability, the Facilities Space Modernization Program will further serve as a mechanism to facilitate enhanced employee and/or community well-being initiatives. Examples of employee and community well-being initiatives could be elder care, child care, or other similar activities. Additionally, to the extent allowed by law, funds may be used as matching funds for leveraging grant opportunities.

USE UNEXPECTED FUNDS ON THIS PRIORITY: CHILDCARE + YOUTH NEEDS WERE SUPPORTED WITH CARES AND ARPA DOLLARS

- SUMMER CAMPS WERE FUNDED FOR 2021-2026.
- AFTERSCHOOL FACILITIES WERE OPENED IN FOUR PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY NEIGHBORHOODS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING, WE WERE ABLE TO QUANTIFY THE NEED: ATHENS HAS 6000 CHILDREN UNDER 5, BUT ONLY CAPACITY IN LICENSED FACILITIES FOR 2500

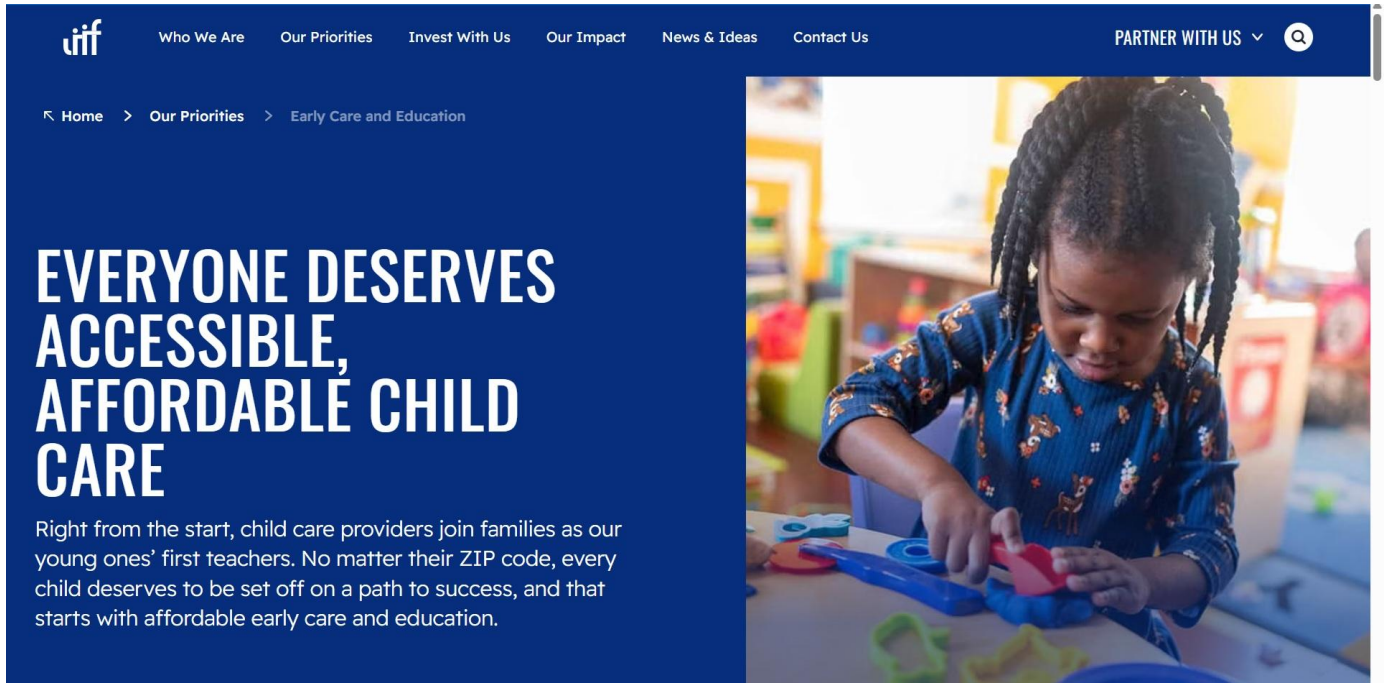


ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT WE HAD SOME WINS: A CO-FUNDED PROGRAM FOR 4TH-8TH GRADE SPORTS PROGRAMMING
- WE ALSO HAD A FAILURE TO LAUNCH: A FUNDING/TRAINING PROGRAM FOR NONPROFIT CHILDCARE PROVIDERS THAT WOULD EMPHASIZE LITERACY AND CURRICULAR GOALS (THE JOY OF FOUR SUPERINTENDENTS IN FIVE YEARS)

ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

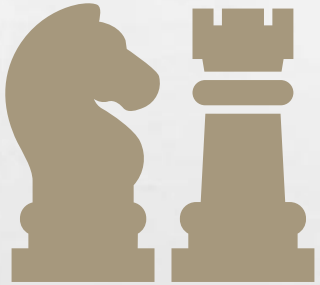
- WHEN SOMETHING IS IMPORTANT, YOU STAY AT THE TABLE…NOW, THROUGH CONTINUED DISCUSSIONS, THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS CONSIDERING HOW THEY COULD BETTER UTILIZE SPACE TO FREE-UP EXISTING CLASSROOMS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDERS.



SOMETIMES THIS COLLECTION OF EFFORTS FEELS REEEEEEEEAL INCONCLUSIVE, BUT...

- IT WAS ENOUGH THAT THE GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION IS USING ATHENS AS THE PILOT FOR HOW CITIES CAN BUILD A TOOLBOX SUPPORTING CHILDHOOD LITERACY, WHICH WILL BE SUPPORTED BY THE LOW INCOME INVESTMENT FUND. THIS WORK WILL EVOLVE THROUGHOUT 2026.

TAKEAWAYS



Play the long-game…coordination won't happen overnight, but you are investing in multi-decade prosperity



Engage with, and message to key stakeholders beyond parents and educators: employers and those interested in public safety