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Cloudy, showers  
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WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 11 2026

\$3

# The Telegraph

MACON.COM

## Water Authority president, executive director dies

BY ALBA ROSA  
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Ron Shipman, the president and executive director of the Macon Water Authority, died Friday evening, the authority announced.

He was appointed the interim president and executive director in 2022 before the role became official. Shipman "provided steady leadership and a deep



Ron  
Shipman

commitment to public service," the MWA said in its news release Friday.

"During his tenure, he worked closely with the Authority's Board of Directors, employees and community partners to advance critical water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure projects that sup-

port the health, safety and economic vitality of Macon-Bibb County," the news release said.

Shipman worked for Georgia Power for more than three decades, holding "multiple leadership roles prior to his retirement," the news release said.

After Shipman joined the MWA, bringing "that extensive experience and a collaborative leadership style to the authority, earning respect from colleagues across the organization and

throughout the community," the authority said.

**'A DEAR FRIEND'**

Gary Bechtel, the MWA's chairman, called Shipman a dear friend who was committed to the authority's success.

"Macon-Bibb mourns his passing," Betchel said in the news release. "On behalf of the members of the Macon Water Authority, we ask for thoughts and prayers for Ron's wife, An-

ita, and his entire family."

Mayor Lester Miller, in a Facebook post, called Shipman a "real consensus builder and problem solver, which is why I selected him as a member of my transition team and recommended him for the position at the MWA."

"This unexpected loss has undoubtedly left a void in my heart," the mayor said in the post. "I am praying for his family immensely! I love you, brother."

**MEMORIAL ARRANGEMENTS COMING SOON**

The MWA said that "information regarding memorial arrangements or organizational updates will be shared as appropriate," according to its news release.



KATIE TUCKER The Telegraph

Newtown Macon president James Fritze looks onto the balcony of the abandoned Bibb Theatre on Thursday in Macon. The upper levels of the theater are set to become lofts in the renovations.

## Historic Bibb Theatre in downtown Macon to gain new life

BY ALBA ROSA  
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Pieces of the old Bibb Theatre's drywall, which has sat vacant since the 1970s, crumbled at the slightest touch during a tour Feb. 5.

NewTown Macon anticipates turning the building on the 500 block of Third Street into lofts and offices, putting "this great

old building back into service," the economic development agency's president, James Fritze, said.

It will cost about \$4 million to renovate the old Bibb Theatre, and it is expected to be completed by early 2027.

The agency bought the building in 2018 in partnership with the Peyton Anderson Foundation under a "program-related investment," according to New-

Town's website. There weren't any plans established for the old Bibb Theatre until the economic development agency announced last year its intention to turn it into lofts.

"This strategy and partnership will begin the process of rehabbing downtown's last abandoned and derelict theatre," the website said.

NewTown Macon believes that, rather than developing

another movie theater in Downtown Macon — since The Capitol Theatre and the Douglass Theatre are close by — renovating the building into residential lofts will provide "sustainable income," according to Fritze.

Fritze said that the \$4 million renovation and construction cost will come from philanthro-

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## Fired Fort Valley police chief called 'very top-heavy'

BY JESSE FRAGA  
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The mayor of Fort Valley, a rural Middle Georgia town with a police force of around three dozen, said she recently fired the city's police chief because,

she alleges, he emotionally abused officers, promoted them without pay raises and spent city money without proper approval.

Fort Valley City Council members did not corroborate Mayor Shakeena Reeves' allegations against Dennis John

"DJ" Flores, the former police chief.

Reeves called Flores' leadership "very top-heavy."

"The officers were being emotionally abused," she claimed to The Telegraph. "They were being followed, recorded, some even had track-

ers put on their cars."

Interim Police Chief David Wilson did not mention issues other than people supposedly being underpaid when Flores was the chief. Wilson said during a meeting with the mayor, council and city departments Monday — his second day in charge of the Fort Valley Police Department — that he was working to remedy any issues.

Wilson claimed that Flores had promised higher pay to

SEE POLICE CHIEF, 4A

During the signing ceremony for the appropriations package, Trump touted the plan as delivering "the lowest prices of anywhere in the world" and urged Republicans to campaign on the issue in the midterms later this year.

"The Republican Party should be able to win the midterms on that alone," Trump said. "That's the biggest thing there is."

His health care plan states

SEE TRUMP, 2A



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