

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026
HABERSHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
JURY ASSEMBLY ROOM
295 LLEWELLYN ST, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room of the Habersham County Courthouse located at 295 Llewellyn St, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Jimmy Tench, Vice Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Ty Akins, Commissioner Kelly Woodall, County Manager Tim Sims, County Attorney Jeff Strickland County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Commissioner Tench called the meeting to order at 6:03

Commissioner Akins led the Invocation.

Commissioner Mealor led the Pledge of Allegiance

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the agenda as presented.

COMMISSION OFFICER ELECTION FOR 2026

a. Chairman

Chairman Jimmy Tench opened the floor for nominations from the Commission for the position of Chairman of the Board for 2026.

Commissioner Mealor nominated Commissioner Bruce Harkness to serve as Chairman of the Board for 2026. This nomination was seconded by Commissioner Akins. Motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner Tench dissenting.

b. Vice Chairman

Chairman Bruce Harkness opened the floor for nominations from the Commission for Vice Chairman of the Board for 2026.

Commissioner Akins nominated Commissioner Dustin Mealor to serve as Vice Chairman of the Board for 2026. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Woodall. Motion carried unanimously (5-0).

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

a. Special Recognition: Ken Schubring

b. Employee Spotlight: Animal Care and Control Department

PUBLIC HEARING:

- a. CU-26-01: Application from Doug Campbell Seeking Conditional Use of 35 Acre Property Located at 850 Preacher Campbell Rd (Parcel 020 036) in the LI, Low Intensity District for the Purpose of an Event Center and Farm Tours

Planning Director Mike Beecham addressed the Commission. Applicant Doug Campbell is seeking conditional use of 35 acres of property located at 850 Preacher Campbell Rd (Parcel 020 036) in the LI, Low Intensity District for the purpose of an event center and farm tours. He explained that the property currently includes a barn originally intended for horse boarding but was never fully outfitted with stalls. The applicant now seeks to host private events, farm tours, and educational programs. Beecham noted that agricultural uses are permitted by right, but special events require a conditional use. The site has a 50' x 231' gravel parking area that can accommodate approximately 50–70 vehicles depending on drive aisle configuration. Public concerns had been raised regarding noise, traffic, and the potential expansion onto adjacent parcels (also owned by the applicant). Beecham clarified that any future expansion would require separate approval. The Planning Commission recommended approval with the following conditions:

- Limited event hours: 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.
- Events limited to private events only (not public)
- Public Works approval of sight distance for driveways

Beecham added that the north driveway meets sight distance requirements, while the south driveway does not.

Commissioner Woodall asked whether the property was currently in use for any non-agricultural purpose? Mr. Beecham responded that it is only being used for horse boarding and pastured horses at this time. A family wedding had been hosted on-site, but it was not commercial in nature.

County Attorney Jeff Strickland invited the applicant to speak.

Applicant Doug Campbell and wife Beverly Campbell addressed the Commission. Ms. Campbell stated the property began as a personal horse farm. She described how the barn had evolved into a nicer structure than originally planned, and that people began inquiring about using the space for private events such as birthdays and graduation parties. She emphasized:

- The intent is not to operate a public or full-scale wedding venue
- Events would be family-focused, private, and limited in scope
- The couple spent 3 years cleaning the property and removing debris and abandoned structures

County Attorney Jeff Strickland invited those in favor of the application to address the Commission.

Ms. Darla Jackson, 777 Preacher Campbell Road, spoke in support. She said the Campbells had built a beautiful building and improved the property. She asked whether a deceleration lane would be required due to road traffic? Commissioner Harkness deferred to Public Works Director Jerry Baggett, noting these are usually difficult to implement. Mr. Baggett explained that deceleration lanes are triggered by volume thresholds and turning movements, which this site does not meet.

County Attorney Jeff Strickland invited those opposed to the application to address the Commission.

Mr. Gregory Dobson, 1260 Preacher Campbell Road, spoke in opposition. He informed the Commission that he had spoken to the Planning Commission about his concerns, and that back in February 2020 a nearby property at 1261 Preacher Campbell Rd had a conditional use application for an event venue as well. The Commission had voted down the conditional use as there were 44 individuals from the areas that had petitioned against it. While he has no objections to horse shows or agricultural events being held on the property, he is opposed to the event venue component due to past issues and the impact on the neighborhood. His son-in-law has experience with DJing events and has expressed that the type of events that would be held on the property would generally be noisy. Mr. Dobson doesn't understand the inconsistency of this conditional use being forwarded for approval when the other was denied.

County Attorney Jeff Strickland provided the applicant an opportunity for rebuttal.

Ms. Campbell addressed the concerns raised. She stated:

- They do not intend to operate a full-time wedding venue
- The site is windy and elevated, which already limits sound
- They are willing to undergo noise studies, provide a contact number, and publish an event schedule online
- A family member would always be on-site during events

Commissioner Harkness asked whether the end time of "10:00 p.m." stipulated in the conditions referred to the event shutting down at 10:00 p.m. or guests being off the property by 10:00 p.m.? Planning Director Beecham confirmed that this would mean that every would be off the property by 10:00 p.m.

Commissioner Akins asked about the sight distance requirements? Beecham responded that Public Works had confirmed the north entrance is compliant, and no traffic study was required to mandate a deceleration lane.

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the conditional use as recommended by the Planning Commission with the following conditions:

- Limited event hours: 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.
- Events limited to private events only (not public)
- Public Works approval of sight distance for driveways

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- a. Mr. Ronnie Gibbs, 2961 Level Grove Road, addressed the Board. Mr. Gibbs expressed concerns about the direction and pace of development in Habersham County. He stated that he supports organic, community-rooted growth like what had just been presented by the Campbells, but was increasingly worried about large-scale commercial development. He questioned the plans to put a future Parks and Recreation Facility on the same property as the new Animal Control facility, noting that the school board had declined to develop this same property due to steep terrain and that the property was, in his words, "worthless to develop." He asked if the Commission had personally visited the site and whether they had conducted traffic assessments before considering development of a recreational area. Mr. Gibbs expressed concern that if both a park and the animal control facility were built on the property, it would exacerbate congestion on Level Grove Road — a road that, in his view, already lacks sufficient right-of-way. He concluded with a philosophical concern about government overreach, stating: "An authority without accountability is a dangerous thing to have to rule the homeplace." He noted that his family had lived on that land since 1832 and asked the Board to be cautious and mindful in how it handled growth and infrastructure.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the agenda as presented.

- a. Consider/Approve Minutes of December 9, 2025 Joint Work Session
- b. Consider/Approve Minutes of December 15, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting
- c. Consider/Approve Revised Ground Lease Agreement with Higgins Construction for One (1) 60' x 60' Box Hangar at Habersham County Airport
- d. Consider/Approve Revised Ground Lease Agreement with FBO Drive for Construction of One (1) 60' x 60'x Box Hangar at Habersham County Airport
- e. Consider/Approve Authorizing Staff to File an Application with the GTIB for Roadway Project Grant
- f. Consider/Approve Applications for Alcohol License Issuance/Renewals for:
 1. Brooks Store 15838 Hwy 197 N in Clarkesville for Malt Beverage and Wine Package Sales

REPORTS:

- a. 2025 County Financial Audit Report: Chris Hollifield, Rushton
- b. County Manager's Report: Tim Sims, County Manager
- c. Departmental Update: Tori Williams, Risk Management

APPOINTMENTS:

DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

6-Year Term Ending 02/17/2032

1. Jeff Bruns (Term Expiration)- Commissioner Mealor's Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to reappoint Jeff Bruns to the Development Authority.

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION (GMRC)

1-Year Term Ending 12/31/2026

1. Jimmy Tench (Commissioner Representative) At-Large Appointment

Though the default for this appointment is the Chairman, Chairman Bruce Harkness stated that he was unable to serve in this capacity due to the constraints of his work. He asked if another Commissioner would be willing to serve in his stead?

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, to appoint Commissioner Woodall to the GMRC as the Commission representative. Motion carries 4-1 with Commissioner Tench dissenting.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Mealor announced he will not seek re-election, noting he has served two terms and views this as a self-imposed term limit. He wished Ms. Shelly Tullis well in her campaign for his seat and thanked the public and his fellow Commissioners for the opportunity to serve.

Chairman Harkness thanked Commissioner Mealor for his service and praised his representation of the Cornelia area. He also thanked county staff, the public, and the media for their continued participation in county government. Chairman Harkness reflected on the county's growth over the years and stated his intent to lead with humility and work cooperatively with the Board. He recognized Commissioner Tench for his service as Chairman in 2025 and noted he would follow up with citizens regarding questions related to the Demorest Fire Station transfer.

Commissioner Akins echoed appreciation for Commissioner Mealor's leadership and service and thanked Commissioner Tench for his work as Chairman through 2025.

Commissioner Woodall extended New Year wishes and reflected on his first year of service, expressing appreciation for county leadership and staff and stating he looks forward to continuing to serve.

Commissioner Tench provided additional comments and discussed several ongoing concerns, including matters related to county administration and operations, employee policies and procedures, representation of commissioners at public events, infrastructure and environmental issues within the county, local tax and legislative matters, and a property-related issue he stated remained unresolved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: Litigation, pursuant to O.C.G.A §50-14-2; Personnel, pursuant to O.C.G.A § 50-14-3(b)(2); and Property Disposal, pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-14-3§ (b)(1)

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing Litigation, pursuant to O.C.G.A §50-14-2; Personnel, pursuant to O.C.G.A § 50-14-3(b)(2); and Property Disposal, pursuant to O.C.G.A. 50-14-3§ (b)(1).

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Commissioner Woodall- aye
Commissioner Harkness- aye
Commissioner Tench- aye
Commissioner Akins- aye
Commissioner Mealor- aye

Motion carries to enter executive session at 8:03 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to leave executive session at 8:43 p.m.

County Attorney Jeff Strickland attested that the matters discussed in executive session were those allow under state law as exceptions to the open meetings act and authorizing the Chairman to sign an affidavit attesting to this.

Motion by Commissioner Meador, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to authorize the Chairman to sign the executive session affidavit.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Meador, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____
Bruce Harkness, Commission Chairman

Attest: _____
Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk