

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, MAY 18, 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 Monday, May 18 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 Bruce Harkness, Vice Chairman Dustin Mealor, Commissioner Ty Akins, Commissioner Kelly Woodall, County Manager Tim Sims, County Attorney Angela Davis, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media, and members of the public.

Chairman Harkness called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

Commissioner Woodall led the Invocation.

Commissioner Akins led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to adopt the agenda as presented.

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a. Employee Spotlight: Story Lawrence Jackson & Charlie Davis
- b. Proclamation of May 17th-23rd, 2026 as EMS Appreciation Week
- c. Recognition of County Manager Tim Sims for Professional Certification Completion

PUBLIC HEARING:

- a. Conditional Use Application CU-26-02: William Gary Seeking Conditional Use to Build and Operate a Self-Storage and Boat/RV Storage Facility on 8-acre parcel (043 055A) located on Cannon Bridge Road in the LI, Low Intensity District

County Attorney Angela Davis reviewed the procedures governing the public hearing process, including allotted speaking times for proponents and opponents and procedures for rebuttal.

Planning and Development Director Mike Beecham presented Conditional Use Application CU-26-02 submitted by William Gary requesting approval to construct and operate a self-storage facility with boat and recreational vehicle storage on approximately eight acres located on Cannon Bridge Road within the LI (Low Intensity) zoning district. Mr. Beecham stated that the property is currently vacant and consists of both pasture and wooded land. He explained that the proposed development included approximately 300 self-storage units together with approximately 51 boat and RV storage spaces.

Mr. Beecham reviewed surrounding land uses and stated that the area is primarily rural and residential in character with nearby agricultural uses, single-family residences, a convenience store, and a previously approved junkyard operation located nearby. He stated that concerns discussed during the Planning Commission review included traffic impacts, lighting, noise, compatibility with surrounding properties, and environmental considerations associated with wetland and stream features identified on the property.

Mr. Beecham explained that portions of the property had been identified on federal mapping as wetlands and stated that, regardless of local opinion, the federal government currently considers portions of the site to fall within wetland jurisdiction. Mr. Beecham stated that while some individuals may disagree with the designation, the County does not have authority to override federal determinations regarding wetlands and any development affecting those areas would ultimately be subject to review and approval through the appropriate federal and state environmental agencies.

Mr. Beecham also stated that the applicant proposed the use of dark-sky lighting and additional buffering and screening to reduce impacts on neighboring properties. He further explained that a GDOT driveway permit would be required for the proposed entrance onto Cannon Bridge Road.

Mr. Beecham stated that the Planning Commission initially considered recommending approval with conditions including privacy fencing, dark-sky lighting, and additional setbacks; however, the motion failed and the Planning Commission subsequently voted to recommend denial of the application.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited the applicant to address the Commission.

Attorney Kevin Ward addressed the Board on behalf of the applicant and stated that the proposed self-storage facility would function as a low-impact commercial use generating minimal traffic compared to other permitted land uses. Mr. Ward stated that environmental professionals retained by the applicant reviewed the property and concluded that the identified wet areas primarily consisted of drainage features rather than substantial wetlands. He further stated that the project incorporated stormwater management measures, buffering, and lighting accommodations intended to reduce impacts on neighboring properties.

Mr. Ward also stated that the applicant intended to maintain the appearance and character of the area by incorporating fencing and landscaping compatible with surrounding agricultural properties.

Applicant William Gary addressed the Board and stated that the property had been in his family for several years and that the project represented an opportunity to establish a long-term business investment while maintaining ties to the community and surrounding family property.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those in favor of Conditional Use Application CU-26-02 to address Commission.

Robert Kimbrell, a neighboring property owner, spoke in support of the request and stated that he did not believe the project would negatively impact the area or create significant traffic concerns. Mr. Kimbrell also stated that the wet areas identified on the property were primarily drainage areas associated with rainfall events.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those opposed to Conditional Use Application Cu-26-02 to address the Commission. There was no one present who wished to speak in opposition to the conditional use request.

Commissioners discussed the proposed development, surrounding land uses, traffic concerns, wetland considerations, compatibility with the surrounding residential and agricultural area, and long-range planning considerations for the community.

Chairman Harkness discussed the Board's responsibility to balance private property rights with preservation of the surrounding community character and expressed concerns regarding long-term compatibility of the proposed development within the area.

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Meador, and voted unanimously (4-0) to deny Conditional Use Application CU-26-02 in accordance with the recommendation of the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

a. Mitchell Payne: Support of Ponderosa Rd Go Cart Dirt Track

Mr. Mitchell Payne addressed the Commission regarding his backyard go-cart dirt track located on Ponderosa Road. Mr. Payne stated that the track was created as a recreational activity for local children and families and noted that several families had become involved in racing activities as a result. He stated that he had worked with neighboring property owners and County officials to address concerns involving drainage, noise, and operations by installing additional drainage infrastructure and modifying equipment contributing to sound concerns. Mr. Payne expressed frustration regarding what he perceived as changing expectations during the process and reiterated his belief that the track provided a positive recreational opportunity for youth within the County.

b. Marie Payne: Support of Ponderosa Rd Go Cart Dirt Track

Ms. Marie Payne spoke in support of the Ponderosa Road go-cart track and stated that her family had consistently attempted to comply with County requirements and address concerns raised by neighboring residents and County officials. Ms. Payne discussed efforts to address drainage, parking, and operational concerns and expressed frustration regarding what she described as inconsistent enforcement and changing expectations during the permitting and code enforcement process. She emphasized that the track was intended to be a family-oriented recreational activity and stated that closure of the track would eliminate a positive outlet for local children and families..

c. Gavin Angulo: Concerns Regarding Ponderosa Rd Go Cart Dirt Track

Mr. Gavin Angulo addressed the Commission in opposition to the Ponderosa Road go-cart track. Mr. Angulo stated that operation of the racetrack had negatively impacted the surrounding neighborhood and cited concerns regarding excessive engine noise, vibrations, dust, lighting, traffic, and the overall visual impact of the property. He stated that the activity was disruptive to nearby residences, incompatible with the surrounding residential area, and had altered the peaceful character of the neighborhood..

d. Christopher Robinson: Recreation Department Funding

Mr. Christopher Robinson addressed the Commission regarding recreation department funding and conditions at County athletic facilities. Mr. Robinson stated that he coaches multiple youth sports programs within Habersham County and expressed concerns regarding deteriorating field conditions, inadequate maintenance, limited practice facilities, and outdated recreational infrastructure. He stated that neighboring counties maintain recreation facilities at a higher standard and expressed concern regarding Habersham County's ability to adequately support youth athletic programs.

Chairman Harkness and County Manager Tim Sims discussed ongoing recreation improvements, including field irrigation projects, field maintenance efforts, gym floor renovations, and recently acquired property intended for future recreation expansion. Commissioner Akins encouraged public participation during the County budgeting process and noted that citizen involvement often influences recreation funding priorities.

e. Dale Green:

Mr. Dale Green addressed the Commission regarding long-term County funding and taxation concerns. Mr. Green referenced the original Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) referendum and questioned whether voters had ever been given the opportunity to reconsider continuation of the tax. He also expressed concerns regarding government spending, taxation, and financial pressures facing residents. Mr. Green further commented on demographic changes within the County and stated that approximately ten different languages are now represented within the local school system. He referenced prior discussions regarding Fieldale Farms potentially relocating operations to South Carolina and questioned why County leaders had encouraged the company to remain in Habersham County rather than allowing the facility to relocate. Before concluding his comments, Mr. Green shared that both he and his wife had recently suffered injuries and expressed appreciation for Habersham County emergency responders who assisted them during those incidents.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the consent agenda as presented.

- a. Consider/Approve Minutes of April 20, 2026 Board of Commissioners Work Session
- b. Consider/Approve Minutes of April 20, 2026 Board of Commissioner Meeting
- c. Consider/Approve Ratification of FY 2026 Family Treatment Court (FTC) Supplemental Grant Award
- d. Consider/Approve Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Board of Education for Use of Old Fairview Elementary School for Habersham County Emergency Services Training Classes
- e. Consider/Approve Ratification of 2026 LMIG Safety Action Plan Grant Application
- f. Consider/Approve FY 2027 Employee Insurance Benefits Renewal (Dental, Vision, Life, Disability & Supplemental Benefits)
- g. Consider/Approve All Documents Necessary for 2027 ACCG Safety Grant and Safety Discount Program and Reaffirming Designation of Risk Manager Tori Williams as Safety Coordinator
- h. Consider/Approve Awarding RFP 2026-12 Contract for New Animal Shelter's Fencing to A&T Fence
- i. Consider/Approve Change Order No P3905-CO-006 With Communications International for P25 Compliant Radio System Project

REPORTS:

- a. County Manager's Report: Tim Sims, County Manager

County Manager Tim Sims reported that County staff continued work on preparation of the Fiscal Year 2027 budget and stated that tax digest information had been received earlier than usual, allowing staff additional time for budget review and planning.

Mr. Sims announced that Habersham County had been awarded a \$2.5 million Congressional Directed Spending grant intended to support construction of the County's future 911 Emergency Operations Facility. He stated that the funding would assist with SPLOST-funded emergency services projects and could allow additional SPLOST funds to be redirected toward fire station renovations and related improvements.

Mr. Sims also provided updates regarding employee insurance enrollment, EMS training graduations, information technology security initiatives, voter registration and election reminders, radio system testing and upgrades, FEMA reimbursement requests related to Winter Storm Fern, and renovations at Fire Station 14 on Camp Creek Parkway.

Additional updates included aquatic center renovations and pool resurfacing, recreation department summer programs, landfill operations, gravel road maintenance activities, debris removal operations following winter storms, and anticipated Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG) funding.

Mr. Sims further discussed legislative changes related to House Bill 581 and local sales tax options intended to provide property tax relief. The Board expressed consensus to proceed with steps necessary to place continuation of the local option sales tax program before County voters.

Chairman Harkness recognized several County employees, department heads, elected officials, and citizens in attendance, including candidates seeking election to the vacant County Commission seat.

b. Update on Unified Development Ordinance: Mike Beecham, Planning Director

Planning Director Mike Beecham provided an update regarding the ongoing development of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) and stated that staff had continued reviewing comments and recommendations received during previous public meetings and work sessions. Mr. Beecham explained that several revisions had been made to the draft ordinance in response to feedback from Commissioners, the Planning Commission, developers, and members of the public, including:

- Removal of the conservation subdivision zoning district
- Reduction of certain minimum lot sizes from five acres to three acres
- Addition of family subdivision exemptions
- Proposed standards related to data center development and water usage
- Reduction of minimum residential home size requirements to approximately 1,400 square feet in certain developments

Mr. Beecham explained that concerns had been raised regarding density calculations and implementation of the conservation subdivision provisions, leading staff to recommend removal of that district from the current draft ordinance. He also discussed proposed modifications to minimum lot size requirements in certain zoning districts, stating that staff was recommending reduction of some minimum lot sizes from five acres to three acres in designated areas in an effort to balance growth management with housing availability and property owner flexibility.

Mr. Beecham further discussed proposed family subdivision exemptions intended to allow property owners additional flexibility for division of family-owned property under limited circumstances while maintaining oversight of future development activity.

Discussion also included proposed standards related to data center development. Mr. Beecham stated that recent interest in large-scale data center projects throughout the region prompted staff to include language addressing water usage, cooling systems, infrastructure impacts, and development standards associated with

such facilities. He explained that proposed language would encourage use of closed-loop cooling systems in an effort to reduce excessive water consumption.

Mr. Beecham also discussed proposed reductions to minimum residential home size requirements within new subdivisions, including reducing the minimum square footage requirement to approximately 1,400 square feet in certain residential developments. He stated that the recommendation was intended to provide additional opportunities for workforce and affordable housing within the County while still maintaining reasonable development standards.

Commissioners discussed affordable housing availability, long-term growth management, preservation of community character, balancing residential development with infrastructure capacity, architectural standards for future residential construction, and whether minimum standards should be included to preserve neighborhood appearance and property values. Commissioners also discussed potential impacts associated with large-scale industrial and data center development, including water consumption demands, utility infrastructure requirements, and whether tax abatements or development incentives should be considered for future projects of that nature. During discussion, Commissioners and staff noted that the County could not outright prohibit data center development; however, development standards and infrastructure requirements within the ordinance could be structured in a manner that would significantly restrict or discourage such projects from locating within the County.

Chairman Harkness stated that the Unified Development Ordinance would significantly impact future growth and development throughout Habersham County and emphasized the importance of continuing careful review of the proposed ordinance prior to adoption.

APPOINTMENTS:

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES BOARD

5- Year Term Ending 06/30/2031

1. Michelle Blackburn (Term Expiration)- At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (4-0) to reappoint Michelle Blackburn to serve on the Department of Family & Children's Services Board.

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION

1- Year Term Ending 06/30/2027

1. Lawrence Bridges (Term Expires 6/30/26)- At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to support reappointment of Lawrence Bridges as Habersham County's private sector representative on the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission.

LIBRARY BOARD

3- Year Term Ending 06/30/2029

1. Lena Baggett (Term Expires 6/30/26)- At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (4-0) to reappoint Lena Baggett to serve on the Library Board.

REGION 2 EMS ADVISORY COUNCIL

3- Year Term Ending 06/30/2029

1. Jeffrey Adams (Term Expires 06/30/26)- At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to reappoint Jeffrey Adams to serve on the Region 2 EMS Advisory Council.

2. Barry Church (Term Expires 6/30/26)- At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to reappoint Barry Church to serve on the Region 2 EMS Advisory Council.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

a. Consider/Approve Ratification of FY 2026 Scrap Tire Abatement Reimbursement Grant Agreement

Solid Waste Director Johnnie Vickers presented information regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 Scrap Tire Abatement Reimbursement Grant through the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. Mr. Vickers explained that the grant program provides reimbursement funding of up to \$75,000 for eligible scrap tire transportation and processing costs associated with local tire amnesty events.

Mr. Vickers stated that Habersham County planned to conduct a Tire Amnesty Event from June 1 through June 6, 2026 to encourage citizens to properly dispose of abandoned, illegally dumped, and scrap tires free of charge. He stated that the event was intended to reduce illegal dumping and improve environmental conditions throughout the County.

Mr. Vickers explained that the selected tire processor, TireTrek, submitted pricing exceeding the Georgia EPD reimbursement rate and stated that the County anticipated approximately \$16,596.90 in overage costs to be covered through existing landfill operational funds. He further stated that the County estimated collection of approximately 10,245 passenger tire equivalents during the event.

Mr. Vickers explained that the grant agreement required execution and submission prior to the Board meeting due to state deadlines and stated that Board ratification was being requested following execution of the agreement by the Chairman.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (4-0) to approve ratification of the FY 2026 Scrap Tire Abatement Reimbursement Grant Agreement.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Woodall encouraged citizens to remember and honor military service members during the upcoming Memorial Day holiday and reflected on the sacrifices made by those who gave their lives in service to the country.

Commissioner Akins commented on the significance of receiving federal funding assistance for emergency infrastructure projects and expressed appreciation for the return of federal resources to support County initiatives.

Vice Chairman Mealor encouraged citizens to participate in the upcoming election and wished residents a safe Memorial Day weekend.

Chairman Harkness emphasized the importance of local leadership and public participation in County government and thanked those in attendance for participating in the meeting.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: No executive session was needed at this meeting.

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: 
Bruce Harkness, Commission Chairman

Attest: 
Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk