

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TOWN HALL MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, JUNE 4, 2026
RUBY C. FULBRIGHT AQUATIC CENTER
120 PAUL FRANKLIN RD, CLARKESVILLE, GA 30523**

The Habersham County Board of Commissioners held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, June 4, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Ruby C. Fulbright Aquatic Center located at 120 Paul Franklin Rd, Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Present was Chairman Bruce Harkness, Commissioner Kelly Woodall, Commissioner Danny McClellon, County Manager Tim Sims, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media, and members of the public.

Chairman Harkness called the town hall meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Commissioner Woodall led the Invocation.

Assistant Planning Director Troy Dills led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENTATION

a. UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

Chairman Harkness welcomed those in attendance and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the proposed Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), present revisions made since the previous Town Hall meeting, and receive public input. He emphasized that the UDO is the result of a multi-year process and reiterated that the Board is continuing to review and revise the ordinance based on public feedback.

Planning Director Mike Beecham provided a comprehensive presentation regarding the proposed Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

Mr. Beecham explained that the County's current land development ordinance, adopted in 1992, does not adequately address modern development pressures. He stated that under the existing ordinance, certain types of development, including large-scale subdivisions and uses such as data centers, could occur with limited oversight, minimal standards, and little opportunity for public input.

He explained that the updated UDO is intended to modernize regulations, consolidate development standards into a single document, and provide clearer guidance for property owners, developers, and staff. The ordinance introduces updated zoning districts, revised development standards, and additional review processes to ensure compatibility between new development and surrounding land uses.

REVISIONS BASED ON PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Mr. Beecham outlined the following revisions made in response to public input:

- Removal of the five-acre minimum lot size district and reassignment to a three-acre agricultural classification
- Reduction in minimum home size from 1,800 square feet to 1,200 square feet
- Addition of family division provisions allowing subdivision for immediate family members
- Removal of proposed derelict building regulations
- Addition of tree preservation requirements

- Establishment of a 50-foot maximum building height
- Enhanced subdivision and density controls
- Addition of accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
- Expanded public review and approval processes
- Strengthened enforcement and compliance measures
- Continued refinement of the zoning map based on public feedback

Mr. Beecham emphasized that the ordinance remains a working document and will continue to be revised based on input from the Board and the public.

DATA CENTER REGULATIONS

Mr. Beecham provided an overview of proposed data center regulations, explaining that while such facilities cannot be prohibited, the ordinance establishes strict requirements regarding location, infrastructure, and operational impacts.

He noted that requirements include detailed application materials, impact considerations, setbacks, and post-construction compliance measures, as well as decommissioning plans with financial assurances.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION:

a. UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

Public Comment – Sally Roscoe

Ms. Sally Roscoe addressed the Board and spoke at length regarding concerns about the long-term direction of growth within Habersham County and the cumulative impact that continued development may have on the community. She emphasized the importance of preserving the rural character of the County and maintaining agricultural land, noting that incremental increases in residential and commercial development could gradually alter the overall identity of the area. Ms. Roscoe raised specific concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, including road conditions, traffic increases, water availability, and utility demands, and questioned whether existing systems are sufficient to accommodate projected growth. She also referenced the broader impact of large-scale developments, expressing concern that evaluating projects individually may overlook their combined effect over time. Ms. Roscoe encouraged the Board to take a long-term, comprehensive approach to planning and to prioritize sustainability and preservation in its decision-making.

In response to concerns regarding infrastructure and cumulative development impacts, Planning Director Mike Beecham explained that the proposed UDO includes additional development standards and review processes, including the evaluation of traffic, utilities, and compatibility, which are intended to provide the County with greater ability to assess and manage growth than under the current ordinance.

Public Comment – Jeanette Byrom

Ms. Jeanette Byrom addressed the Board and spoke in detail regarding the protection of private property rights and the potential unintended consequences of zoning changes within the proposed UDO. She expressed concern that new zoning classifications and regulatory requirements could limit how property owners are able to use their land, particularly in cases where properties have historically been used in a certain manner or have retained flexibility for future use. Ms. Byrom emphasized that property owners should not be placed in a position where they must seek rezoning or special approvals to maintain reasonable or previously permitted uses, and she raised concerns about the potential for decreased property values if restrictions are

perceived as limiting. She also discussed the lack of widespread public awareness regarding the ordinance, noting that many residents may not fully understand its implications, and encouraged the Board to improve communication and ensure transparency throughout the process.

Chairman Harkness addressed concerns related to property rights, stating that the Board does not support actions that would take or unfairly restrict private property and emphasizing that the intent of the UDO is to provide structure and predictability for growth rather than impose unnecessary limitations.

Public Comment – Larry Shedd

Mr. Larry Shedd addressed the Board and focused on concerns related to infrastructure readiness and the County's ability to support continued growth. He emphasized that development should not proceed without clear planning for roads, utilities, and public services, and expressed concern that growth may outpace the County's ability to maintain and expand infrastructure. Mr. Shedd specifically referenced the potential for increased traffic, road deterioration, and strain on rural road systems, noting that these impacts are often felt most significantly in less developed areas. He stressed the importance of requiring development to account for its impact on infrastructure and encouraged the Board to ensure that future projects are aligned with the County's capacity to support them.

County Manager Tim Sims addressed these concerns by noting that the proposed UDO introduces additional tools to evaluate development impacts and is intended to better align growth with infrastructure capacity through improved planning and review processes.

Public Comment – Chip Brooks (Farm Bureau)

Mr. Chip Brooks, representing the Farm Bureau, addressed the Board and spoke in support of protecting agricultural land and ensuring the long-term viability of farming within Habersham County. He stated that he had conducted a survey of Farm Bureau members and agricultural stakeholders within the County to gather input regarding the proposed UDO. Mr. Brooks reported that the survey results indicated widespread concern among farmers about the loss of agricultural land due to increasing residential development and the growing potential for conflicts between farming operations and nearby residential uses.

He emphasized that agriculture is a foundational component of the County's economy and identity and noted that farmers are increasingly facing pressure from encroaching development. Mr. Brooks discussed how residential development near agricultural operations can lead to complaints about noise, odors, and normal farming practices, which may ultimately restrict those operations. He encouraged the Board to adopt policies that protect farmland, support agricultural activities, and minimize land use conflicts. Mr. Brooks also expressed appreciation for revisions already made and encouraged continued engagement with the agricultural community.

Public Comment – Alan Irvin

Mr. Alan Irvin addressed the Board and raised concerns regarding how the proposed UDO may affect the future use and flexibility of private property. He questioned how zoning classifications would be applied to existing parcels and whether property owners may lose the ability to develop or use their land in ways that are currently allowed or anticipated. Mr. Irvin emphasized that uncertainty in zoning can create challenges for property owners attempting to plan for the future and noted that overly restrictive classifications could limit economic opportunities. He encouraged the Board to ensure that the ordinance maintains flexibility and does not unintentionally restrict reasonable land use options.

In response to questions regarding zoning application and flexibility, Mr. Beecham explained that the UDO is intended to provide clearer standards and predictability while still allowing property owners to pursue uses through established zoning and review processes.

Public Comment – Jamie Brantley

Mr. Jamie Brantley addressed the Board and focused on concerns related to long-term planning and the sustainability of growth within the County. He emphasized that development should be carefully evaluated to ensure that it aligns with the County's ability to provide services such as road maintenance, emergency response, and utilities. Mr. Brantley expressed concern that insufficient planning could result in long-term financial and operational challenges for the County. He also highlighted the importance of maintaining the quality of life for current residents, noting that rapid or poorly managed growth could negatively impact both infrastructure and community character.

These concerns were addressed generally by County Manager Sims, who emphasized the importance of long-term planning and noted that the UDO is intended to improve the County's ability to evaluate growth and align development with available resources.

Public Comment – Mona Motts

Ms. Mona Motts addressed the Board and expressed concerns regarding the impact of development on the character and identity of the community. She emphasized the importance of preserving the rural nature of Habersham County and maintaining the qualities that make it distinct. Ms. Motts discussed concerns about increasing development pressure and questioned whether existing infrastructure and services are prepared to accommodate additional growth. She also expressed concern that changes in development patterns could alter the visual and environmental character of the area.

Mr. Beecham addressed these concerns during discussion by noting that the ordinance includes provisions such as tree preservation requirements, density controls, and development standards intended to help maintain community character and manage how development occurs.

Public Comment – Annie Sanchez

Ms. Annie Sanchez addressed the Board and focused on the issue of public awareness and accessibility of information related to the proposed UDO. She expressed concern that many residents may not be fully informed about the ordinance or understand how it could affect their property. Ms. Sanchez emphasized that the complexity of zoning and land use regulations can make it difficult for the average citizen to interpret the changes being proposed. She encouraged the Board to expand outreach efforts, provide clearer explanations, and ensure that residents have meaningful opportunities to engage in the process and provide input.

In response, staff noted that information is available through the County website, the County's official Facebook page, and the online mapping system, and that additional opportunities such as open house sessions are being provided to assist residents.

Public Comment – Tommy Adams

Mr. Tommy Adams addressed the Board and discussed concerns regarding the relationship between growth and infrastructure capacity. He emphasized that development should be supported by adequate roads, utilities, and public services and cautioned against allowing growth to occur without sufficient planning. Mr.

Adams expressed concern that increased development could lead to congestion, road deterioration, and strain on existing systems.

These concerns were addressed generally through discussion of the ordinance's enhanced review processes, which are intended to better evaluate infrastructure impacts prior to development approval.

Public Comment – Jason Smith

Mr. Jason Smith addressed the Board and focused on the need for clear planning and consistency in zoning decisions. He expressed concern that without clearly defined standards, development decisions could become inconsistent or difficult for property owners to understand. Mr. Smith emphasized the importance of ensuring that zoning regulations are applied uniformly and that property owners have a clear understanding of how their land may be used. He also discussed the importance of long-term planning and encouraged the Board to ensure that development decisions are made with future impacts in mind.

Public Comment – Sandra Cantrell

Ms. Sandra Cantrell addressed the Board and expressed concerns regarding how continued development may impact infrastructure and overall quality of life within the County. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that growth is supported by adequate services, including roads and utilities, and noted that insufficient planning could lead to long-term issues for residents. Ms. Cantrell also raised concerns about how zoning changes may affect property owners and encouraged the Board to ensure that regulations are clearly communicated and fairly applied.

Public Comment – Natalie Padea

Ms. Natalie Padea addressed the Board and discussed the importance of balancing growth with preservation of the County's natural resources and community character. She expressed concern that increased development could place pressure on infrastructure and the environment, particularly if not carefully managed. Ms. Padea emphasized the need for long-term planning and encouraged the Board to consider how current decisions will impact future generations. She highlighted the importance of maintaining the qualities that make the County desirable while accommodating growth.

Public Comment – John Ackland

Mr. John Ackland addressed the Board and expressed concerns regarding infrastructure capacity and long-term growth management. He emphasized that roads, utilities, and public services must be capable of supporting additional development and noted that failure to plan appropriately could result in significant challenges for the County. Mr. Ackland encouraged the Board to ensure that development decisions are tied to infrastructure readiness and that growth is managed in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Public Comment – Alice Venter

Ms. Alice Venter addressed the Board and focused on concerns related to zoning clarity and the potential impact of development on the community. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that zoning regulations are clearly defined so that property owners understand how their land may be used. Ms. Venter also expressed concern that inconsistent or unclear regulations could create confusion and uncertainty. She encouraged the Board to ensure that the ordinance provides clear guidance and supports thoughtful development.

Public Comment – Jared Brooks

Mr. Jared Brooks addressed the Board and discussed concerns related to transparency and consistency in zoning and development decisions. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that the public is informed and involved throughout the process and that decisions are made in a clear and consistent manner. Mr. Brooks also highlighted the importance of maintaining trust between the Board and the community by ensuring that the ordinance is applied fairly and that residents have a clear understanding of its implications.

CLOSING REMARKS

Chairman Harkness thanked those in attendance for their participation and emphasized the importance of continued public engagement throughout the UDO process. He reiterated the Board's commitment to protecting property rights, managing growth responsibly, and ensuring that the final ordinance reflects the needs and concerns of the community.

Vice Chairman Mealor and Commissioner Woodall also expressed appreciation for the public's input and emphasized the importance of community feedback in shaping the final ordinance.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND OUTREACH

Citizens were advised that information regarding the proposed Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), including maps, draft documents, and updates, is available through multiple sources, including the Habersham County website, the County's official Facebook page, and the online mapping system. Staff encouraged residents to review available materials, utilize online tools to view property-specific information, and attend future meetings or open house sessions for additional assistance.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (3-0) to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____
Bruce Harkness, Commission Chairman

Attest: _____
Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk