

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, JUNE 15, 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, June 15, 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 Meador, Commissioner Ty Akins, Commissioner Kelly Woodall, Commissioner Danny McClellon, 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 6:02 p.m.

Commissioner Woodall led the Invocation.

Commissioner Meador led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a. Employee Spotlight: Ryan Ireland (Solid Waste Department)

County Manager Tim Sims recognized Mr. Ryan Ireland from the Solid Waste Department for his exceptional service and dedication to the county's waste management and environmental operations. The Board expressed appreciation for his hard work and commitment to keeping Habersham County clean.

- b. Proclamation of June 15th – 20th, 2026 as Solid Waste and Recycling Workers Week

County Manager Sims presented a proclamation designating the week of June 15th through June 20th, 2026, as Solid Waste and Recycling Workers Week in Habersham County. The proclamation honored the essential workforce that maintains the infrastructure, public health, and environmental safety of the community through daily sanitation services. Chairman Harkness formally presented the proclamation to departmental representatives.

PUBLIC HEARING:

- a. Conditional Use Application CU-26-03: Chris and Melissa Brooks Seeking Conditional Use for a Wedding/Event Center on 6.24 acre parcel (parcel 102 204) located at 480 Barron Drive in the LI, Low Intensity District

Planning Director Mike Beecham addressed the Commission to outline the application details. He stated that applicants Chris and Melissa Brooks are requesting a conditional use permit to establish a wedding and event center on a 6.24-acre tract (parcel 102 204) located along Barron Drive. The property is in the LI, low intensity district and currently has a single-family home on it. There is a very large approximately 400-by-100 foot area which can be used for parking. Mr. Beecham noted that the property backs up to Young Drive, sits

adjacent to a blueberry farm on its western boundary, and borders the county fairgrounds and recreation center to the south.

Mr. Beecham reported that the applicants intend to cap guest attendance at a maximum of 50 individuals, which includes the wedding party. They anticipate hosting up to 30 events per year, primarily concentrated on weekends. He noted that while a couple had spoken in opposition at the Planning Commission meeting regarding the potential use of a Georgia Power utility easement cut-in from Young Drive for event access, the applicants confirmed they do not intend to utilize that route. Conversely, the planning office received 10 letters of support from area neighbors. In response to Planning Commission inquiries regarding potential disturbances, the applicants noted that alcohol would be prohibited on-site and all event activities would conclude by a strict 9:00 PM curfew. Furthermore, the applicants pledged to build a fence along the southern portion of the property to prevent guests from wandering. Based on these protections, the Planning Commission forwarded a recommendation of approval subject to the following 9 specific conditions:

1. No alcohol allowed is required in the contract.
2. Curfew shall be 9:00 PM.
3. Habersham County can require a hearing to allow the Conditional Use to continue if the property is ever sold.
4. Young Drive cannot be used for access for event purposes.
5. No exterior freestanding lighting is allowed.
6. A fence shall be installed between the applicant's property and 256 Young Drive.
7. A limit of 30 paid private events per year.
8. A maximum attendance of 50 guests per event.
9. The facility must adhere to all ADA standards.

Commissioner Woodall inquired if the applicants understood that the county hosts events nearby that could create overlapping noise. The applicants replied that they did not anticipate any conflicts as their planned reception layout features an indoor area. Commissioner Akins asked about the county's mechanism for monitoring the venue's event frequency and alcohol restrictions. Deputy Williams clarified that compliance checks would be complaint-based, allowing deputies to respond and verify the site. Mr. Beecham added that building inspectors would inspect the venue's lighting configurations during standard structural inspections.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited the applicants to speak. They testified that no actual road currently exists on Young Drive, noting that Georgia Power agreed to cut one 1.5 years ago but has not done so. They stated a security gate would be installed at that location, which would remain locked with key access restricted to themselves and Georgia Power. Regarding the fencing, they had agreed with the neighbors to split the open area that they are worried about, even though it is over 600 feet away from where the events are going to be. They plan to build a wood fence with four tiers, just like they have on the other side of their property. The applicants also noted that due to ADA regulations and their specific building floor plan, attendance cannot exceed 49 people. They reaffirmed their commitment to a strict "dry" venue policy and the 9:00 PM curfew, explaining that any alcohol violation would result in immediate cancellation of the event and forfeiture of the security deposit. They further assured the Board that no exterior lighting would face the neighboring residential homes and that they would handle all event planning internally. Ms. Brooks informed the Commission that there will be no cooking or on-site catering, however everything else such as the

photography, music, planning, decorating, setup, etc. would be handled internally by the family. She feels that this should eliminate the worry regarding daily public access to the property.

No other individuals came forward to speak in support, and no one was present to speak in opposition. The public hearing was subsequently closed.

Commissioner Akins observed that while the lack of opposition was a positive indicator and he appreciated the applicants proactively contacting their neighbors, the county has historically faced issues when trying to accommodate requests that carry numerous restrictive conditions that are difficult to track continuously.

Commissioner Harkness noted that a lot of people have inquired as to why they have been working on the unified development ordinance and zoning in the County, and he wants them to know that it is to address situations like this one. This conditional request is for property that is located in what is a traditionally residential neighborhood. The planning commission has recommended it for approval with conditions, however in the future the allowed uses for a property would be built into the ordinance and more cut and dry as to what is allowed.

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the conditional use with the nine (9) conditions as recommended by the Planning Commission.

b. First Reading of Proposed FY 2027 Budget

Finance Director Kiani Holden addressed the Commission to deliver a presentation on the proposed fiscal year budget. She provided a detailed timeline of the annual budget preparation process and reviewed the primary fiscal objectives established by the County Manager and the Finance Department. Ms. Holden explained the administrative formatting and utilization of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Request forms, the Budget Document Position Request forms, and the Expenditure Justification forms.

Ms. Holden reported that the FY 2026 amended budget stood at \$41.154 million. While the initial departmental requests for FY 2027 totaled \$47.126 million (representing a 12.76% year-over-year increase), the budget committee successfully reduced that figure by approximately \$3.1 million to a recommended budget of \$43.988 million, scaling the final adjustment down to roughly a 6.44% increase from FY 2026. She explained that FY 2026 general fund has earmarked \$917,488 for capital projects to be allocated directly to the CIP, with \$604,554 being drawn from the fund balance. While departments requested 9 new full-time positions and 3 part-time positions, the budget committee only recommended funding 6 full-time EMT/Basic Firefighters in order to reopen two unstaffed county fire stations. Those two fire stations are the New Liberty and Fairview stations, as their closure would have effected the ISO rating.

Ms. Holden informed the Commission that prior to departmental requests, they started out with a base budget for FY 2027 that had already increased by \$1.3 million attributed to the following:

- A countywide base salary increase of 1.5%, equating to \$310,000, fulfilling the remaining half of the 3% salary adjustment initiated in FY 2026.
- A \$232,000 increase in health insurance costs, with half of the increase absorbed into employee contributions.
- A \$100,000 increase in retirement obligations resulting from salary adjustments and the expiration of credits used to offset the previous year's obligations.
- A utility cost increase of \$127,800.

- A \$719,640 increase in the 911 emergency transfer fund, caused by declining landline fee collections and the fact that the dispatch department is fully staffed for the first time in several years.

On a more positive note, she informed the Commission that revenue was also expected to increase for FY 2027 due to the following:

- New growth from property taxes of a little over 8%.
- An increase in intergovernmental revenues driven by grants and funding from the City of Demorest to cover the salaries of firefighters at the stations absorbed by the county.
- An increase in other of 7%, due mainly to an increase in the revenue from the fire premium tax that funds the fire departments.
- An overall revenue growth projection of 6.44%.

Commissioner Woodall noted that because the county is actively funding two unstaffed fire stations, citizens should see a lower overall tax bill alongside a decrease in the millage rate. Chairman Harkness clarified that a major objective behind funding these two stations is to safeguard the county's ISO rating. He warned that the county recently learned the rating was in jeopardy of rising, which would cause homeowner insurance premiums to skyrocket, and if it increases, the county lacks the administrative mechanism to lower it back down for a 5-year period. Reopening the stations ensures adequate fire and rescue protection.

Ms. Holden went into further detail regarding changes that have occurred in revenue and expenses on departmental and fund levels. The Commission had questions and a more in-depth discussion ensued regarding the increase to the Animal Control operating budget. Ms. Holden informed the Commission that the increase to the operational budget for Animal Control was due primarily to a projected \$253,000 increase in dedicated veterinary service costs. This line-item increase is primarily driven by mandatory animal vaccinations and escalating expenditures associated with required spay and neuter operations. To mitigate these rising costs, county administration expressed an intent to explore alternative service delivery models, including potential partnerships or specialized contracting for high-volume spay and neuter services. County Manager Sims further informed the Commission that he and staff have been in touch with a non-profit called "Leftover Pets" that Commissioner Mealor had referred to them. That group lost the leased space that they were operating out of in Athens and looking for a new place to set up a mobile surgical clinic. Staff is in discussions with them regarding the possibility of providing them with a space for their trailer in exchange for reduced cost veterinary services for shelter animals.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited all those who wished to speak on the proposed FY 20267 public to address the Commission.

Mr. Blain Wasden stepped forward with a cost-saving suggestion for the county's animal control operations. He recalled adopting a cat from Cobb County years ago where the animal was microchipped and a future-dated warrant was issued for one month later; if the owner returned within that timeframe to prove the animal was spayed or neutered, the warrant was dismissed. He felt that this could be a way to help with shifting the cost of spaying and neutering to the adopting party without causing a burden on animal control.

No other citizens came forward to speak regarding the budget, and the public hearing was closed. Chairman Harkness reminded the audience that no formal vote would occur tonight and noted that a second public hearing would take place prior to adoption.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Members of the Habersham County 10-U Baseball Team addressed the Commission. The players and coaching staff announced that they won the District Championship and will be representing Habersham County at the State Championship tournament next week. They expressed immense pride in representing their community and highlighted their hard work throughout the season. They noted that participating in the state tournament provides a tremendous opportunity but incurs significant team expenses for travel, lodging, and meals. They requested community support and funding to help offset these costs, stating they are honored to wear the county's name.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the consent agenda as presented. *(Clerk's Note: Commissioner Meador had stepped out momentarily during this vote but returned to the bench immediately following the call).*

- a. Consider/Approve Minutes of May 18, 2026 Board of Commissioners Meeting
- b. Consider/Approve Minutes of June 04, 2026 Board of Commissioner Town Hall on UDO
- c. Consider/Approve Addendum #2 to FY 2026 Contract with Legacy Link for Senior Center
- d. Consider/Approve Ground Lease with Roland R. Manarin for Construction of One (1) 60' x 60' Hangar at Habersham County Airport
- d. Consider/Approve Surplus Vehicle and Equipment List for Auction
- e. Consider/Approve Contract with Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security (GEMA/HS) for Vulnerable Population Evacuation Transportation Services
- f. Consider/Approve Renewal of Property & Liability Insurance with ACCG-IRMA for FY 2027
- g. Consider/Approve Intergovernmental Agreement Between Habersham County and the Other Counties of the Mountain Judicial Circuit (Stephens County, Rabun County, and Banks County) for the FY 2027 Budget Year
- h. Consider/Approve FY 2027 Annual Financial Budget Agreement with UGA for Extension Services
- i. Consider/Approve 2026 Audit Engagement with Rushton & Company
- j. Consider/Approve Resolution of Notice to Proceed Related to Issuance of Voter-Approved SPLOST Bonds

REPORTS:

- a. County Manager's Report: Tim Sims, County Manager
- b. Update on Unified Development Ordinance Development: Mike Beecham, Planning Director

APPOINTMENTS:

RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD

3- Year Term Ending 12/31/2026

1. Joe Elam (Resignation)- Commissioner McClellon's Appointment

Chairman Harkness informed the Commission that Commissioner McClellon had requested that this item be tabled until next month.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to table this appointment until next month.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Consider/Approve Resolution Extending the Limited Moratorium on Acceptance of Applications For Preliminary Plat Approval for Residential Developments of Five Lots or More and Rezoning to the Residential Single Family (LI-R), Residential Multi-Family (MI-R), and Planned Development (PD) Land Use Districts

County Attorney Angela Davis addressed the Commission regarding the proposed extension. She explained that the moratorium extension would remain in effect until the day after the next regularly scheduled meeting. This window is designed to allow the newly seated commissioner adequate time to review the materials and incorporate his suggestions alongside the recent revisions generated from public town hall meetings. This moratorium would be in effect through to July 21st, to allow for the Commission to discuss and vote on the proposed Unified Development Ordinance at the July 20th Board of Commissioners meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the resolution extending the limited moratorium through July 21, 2026.

- b. Consider/Approve Award of RFP 2026-08 for Airport Consulting Services for Airport Planning

Finance Director Kiani Holden presented the selection details for Airport Planning services under RFQ 2026-08. Parallel to the design contract, Ms. Holden noted that FAA operational guidelines require a separate evaluation and selection for airport planning services every five years to maintain federal grant eligibility. With the existing contract terminating on June 30, 2026, the county completed its procurement review. As with the design contract, the review process focused entirely on the firm's qualifications, with no pricing information utilized during the committee's scoring. Ms. Holden informed the Commission that Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc received the highest score in both the consulting services category and the planning category. Staff has recommended their selection for both. This agenda item is requesting authorization the County Manager to negotiate the terms and pricing for a five-year planning services agreement.

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner McClellon, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve.

- c. Consider/Approve Award of RFP 2026-09 for Airport Consulting Services for Airport Design

Finance Director Kiani Holden presented the evaluation results and selection recommendations for Airport Design services under RFQ 2026-09. Ms. Holden explained that compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations mandates that local airport sponsors conduct a competitive qualification-

based selection process for engineering and design consultants every five years. Because the county's current five-year agreement is set to expire on June 30, 2026, the county issued a formal Request for Qualifications. She emphasized that in accordance with these federal guidelines, the proposals were evaluated and scored strictly on professional qualifications and did not factor in any pricing information. Ms. Holden reported that three competitive proposals were received and subsequently evaluated and scored by the county's review committee. Based on these objective point totals, staff recommended that the Board approve the selection of Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. as the primary design consultant for the upcoming five-year cycle and grant authorization to county administration to initiate formal contract negotiations.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted Unanimously (5-0) to approve.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Akins offered no comment.

Commissioner Mealor wished everyone a fun and safe 4th of July. He expressed his gratitude for having solid, reliable property tax numbers available early during this year's budget development sessions, noting it significantly aided their financial planning.

Commissioner Woodall thanked the public for their exceptional level of participation in the UDO project, praising the extensive community involvement. He also extended his appreciation to Mike Beecham and the entire planning staff for their hard work.

Commissioner McClellon offered no comment.

Chairman Harkness shared a historical reflection, noting that three individuals from Georgia signed the Declaration of Independence and that three counties in the state were subsequently named in honor of those gentlemen.

Commissioner Akins reminded the room that County Manager Sims' birthday is tomorrow.

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

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
By: 
Bruce Harkness, Commission Chairman

Attest: 
Brandalyn Carnes, County Clerk

