

**HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MEETING MINUTES
6:00 P.M., MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2025
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, August 18, 2025 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 Angela Davis, County Clerk Brandalin Carnes, staff, members of the media and the public.

Commissioner Tench called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Commissioner Harkness led the Invocation.

Commissioner Woodall led the Pledge of Allegiance

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the agenda with the following changes:

1. Removal from the agenda of consent agenda item “i. Consider/Approve Temporary FY 2026 Subcontractor Coordinated Transportation Services Agreement with Verida, Inc for Provision of Transportation Services to Eligible DHS Seniors”.
2. Removal from the agenda of Executive Session.
3. Addition to the agenda of new business item “b. Consider/Approve Change Order #3 to Pittman Construction Company’s 2025 LMIG Contract”.

PRESENTATIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- a. Special Recognition: Barry Church, Commander of VFW Post 7720
- b. Employee Spotlight: Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk
- c. Proclamation Recognizing September 2025 as National Recovery Month
- d. Recognition of Award of Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to Habersham County

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

There were no individuals who signed up for public comment either before the meeting or at the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING:

- a. Map Amendment Application Z-25-02: Application by Greg and Paula Bagley for a Map Amendment to Rezone 26.239 Acres Located at 1191 Blair Road (Tax Parcel 132 003) from AG, Agricultural District to LI, Light Intensity District

Planning Director Mike Beecham addressed the Commission. Applicants Greg and Paula Bagley are requesting a map amendment to rezone 26.239 acres of an 85.13-acre parcel (Tax Parcel 132 003) that they own at 1191 Blair Road from AG, Agricultural District to LI, Light Intensity District. The purpose of this zoning change would be to allow the buyer of the 26.239 acres, A & R homes, to have the ability to subdivide the property into a 17-lot development. Under the current zoning AG zoning, any lots are required to have a 3-acre lot size minimum. Rezoning the property to LI would allow for the reduction of the required lot size to a 1-acre minimum. Mr. Beecham informed the Commission that this hearing is just for the rezoning, and that A&R homes has not started the review process for the development yet. A separate application would need to be made for the actual development of the property before it can move forward. This map amendment was heard by the Planning Commission at their August 5, 2025 meeting. The Planning Commission discussed their concerns about the placement of the new road due to sight distance as well as the impact on traffic, road safety and the school system. Neighboring properties are primarily zoned LI, Low Intensity. The Comprehensive Plan identifies the area in which the parcel is located as "Suburban Transition" and the proposed change would be in conformity with the Comprehensive Land Development Ordinance. The proposed change would not affect the overall character of the area or diminish property values. The Planning Commission normally notifies the school system once they receive development plans, so they have an opportunity to voice concerns regarding any negative impact. There was only one citizen who spoke regarding the request, stating that his primary concern was that the subdivision would eventually expand to the remainder of the property. He wasn't necessarily opposed to the 17 proposed lots so long as the subdivision didn't keep expanding. The Planning Commission explained that any future expansion would have to go through the Commission for another rezoning. The Planning Commission is forwarding this recommendation to the Board of Commissioners to approve Map Amendment Z-25-02.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited the applicant to address the Commission. Though applicants Greg and Paula Bagley were not present to speak, Mr. Zach Tibbs was present to speak as the family's representative. He informed the Commission that they had surveyors come out to the property to check the line-of-sight distance where ingress and egress from the property would occur, and that there was a sight distance of 350 feet going toward town and 650 feet going away from town. Both distances fall within the requirements. He also wanted to let the Commission know that, while they do intend to have a road so the family can access the remainder of the 85.13 acre property, there is no intent to develop the remaining property.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited anyone else present in support of the map amendment to address the Commission. There was no one else present who wished to speak in support of the map amendment.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited anyone present in opposition of the map amendment to address the Commission. There was no present who wished to speak in opposition to the map amendment.

Commissioner Akins stated that, in light of the fact that the County has contracted a third party who has been working on updating the land use ordinances and zoning, he would like to recommend postponing a decision on this map amendment until next month. This would allow the Commission an opportunity to see where things stand with the update and get some clarification. Commissioner Woodall echoed this sentiment, saying that he would feel more comfortable with having a completed unified development code.

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to table the decision on Map Amendment Application Z-25-02.

- b. Revocation of Conditional Use CU-24-07: Revocation of Conditional Use for Kennel and Dog Training/Breeding Facility Granted to Celeste Wood for 1.5 Acres Located at 786 Stonepile Road (Parcel 065 155A) in the LI, Low Intensity District Due to Failure to Meet Conditions

Mike Beecham addressed the Commission. On July 15, 2025 the Commission granted Celeste Wood conditional use for a kennel and dog training facility with breeding for a 1.5 acre property located at 786

Stonepile Rd (Tax Parcel 065 155A) in the LI, Low Intensity District. The sole condition of this use was that she was required to construct the building to house the animals within twelve months of approval. This building was not constructed. Additionally, Ms. Wood has had her state breeders license revoked by the Georgia Department of Agricultural as well as failing to renew her Habersham County business license. It is for these reasons that staff is recommending revocation of conditional use CU-24-07. Previous County Attorney Donnie Hunt recommended going through the formal process of revocation rather than just allowing the conditional use to expire.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited the holder of the conditional use, Ms. Celeste Wood, to address the Commission. Ms. Wood was not present to speak.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those who wished to in opposition to the revocation of CU-24-07 to address the Commission. There were none present who wished to speak in opposition to the revocation.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those who wished to in favor of the revocation of CU-24-07 to address the Commission. There were none present who wished to speak in favor of the revocation.

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to revoke conditional use CU-24-07.

c. Reading and Approval of Proposed 2025 County Millage Rate

Financial Administrator Kiani Holden addressed the Commission, reviewing a presentation with them that gave information regarding the process by which a millage rate is determined based off of the property digest. For 2025, there was \$151.43 million in new growth added to the property digest, making the net digest for 2025 \$2.165 billion. Ms. Holden explained the effect of exemption on the tax digest, informing the Commissioners that exemptions increased by \$207.81 million from 2024 to 2025 and that the current total of exempt property from which Habersham County receives no tax revenue is \$908.04 million. County Manager Sims informed the Commission that about 80% of the residential properties in Habersham County have the floating homestead freeze, which prevents the County from taxing those properties on any increase in their reassessed values. Those who don't receive the County's local homestead freeze exemption will now be under the HB581 freeze exemption, which limits the increase in the properties taxable value by the rate of inflation. Mr. Sims explained the millage rates being proposed include a full rollback, which means that most individuals should see no increase in their property taxes. The proposed 2025 millage rate compared to the current 2024 millage rate are as follows:

	<u>2025 (Proposed)</u>	<u>2024 (Current)</u>
General Fund M&O Millage	11.272	11.771
Hospital Debt Fund-Bonds	1.129	.757
Emergency Services	1.275	1.275
Total:	13.676	13.803

The proposed 2025 millage rate reflects an overall decrease of .127 mills from the 2024 millage rate.

Ms. Holden explained that the millage rate for the hospital debt fund bonds increased because they are no longer able to make those payments with SPLOST funds, as the \$5 million that was included in the referendum for this purpose has been exhausted.

Ms. Holden gave a breakdown of how unincorporated property taxes are distributed, informing everyone that the school system receives 50.27%, the hospital bond receives 4.11%, emergency services receives 4.64% and the remaining 40.98% goes to the county general fund. This 40.98% of taxes received for Habersham County's general fund is further distributed as follows:

Public Safety	18.02%
General Government	9.50%
Judicial System	5.06%
Public Works	3.50%
Recreation & Culture	1.72%
Housing & Development	1.21%
Capital Improvement Projects	1.06%
Debt Service	0.39%
Health & Welfare	0.52%

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those who wished to speak in favor of the proposed 2025 millage rates to address the Commission. There were none present who wished to speak in favor of the proposed 2025 millage rates.

County Attorney Angela Davis invited those who wished to speak in opposition to the proposed 2025 millage rates to address the Commission. There were none present who wished to speak in opposition to the proposed 2025 millage rates.

Commissioner Harkness inquired about the amount at which the millage rate was rolled back. Ms. Holden informed him that the county general fund M&O millage will have a full rollback of around .5 mil. Commissioner Akins stated that the rollbacks are not quite what they used to be because of all the exemptions on the taxable digest. County Manager Sims concurred, stating that the Board of Education was able to have a 1 mill rollback due in part to the fact that they don't have as many exemptions. Commissioner Harkness asked if the total of the millages was increasing? Ms. Holden informed him that there was a greater decrease for the general fund M&O millage rate than there was an increase in the hospital debt millage rate, so there was an overall decrease of .127 mils for the proposed 2025 County millages. Ms. Holden went on to state that the Board of Education intends to vote on a proposed 1 mill rollback at their meeting next Monday, August 25th.

Commissioner Tench stated that he was bothered by the fact that the Commission gave \$6 million to Hall County Hospital. Mr. Sims informed him that the \$6 million in question did not go to Hall County Hospital, it was a line of credit that was given to the Habersham County Hospital Authority to be able to keep the hospital open for six months until Northeast Georgia Health Systems could take over.

Commissioner Woodall stated that he realizes that there may be several property owners who contest their reassessments, and he wanted to know if this was considered when determining the millage rate? Mr. Sims stated that there was a 45-day process for reassessments and appeals. As this is a reevaluation year, so long as they are not 8% over the preliminary finalized digest they don't have to come back before the Commission. If it is over 8%, then they will have to come back to the Commission to approve a lower millage rate.

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, to approve the proposed 2025 millage rate at 11.272 for the Habersham County General Fund millage rate. Motion carried 3-2 with Commissioner Tench and Commissioner Harkness dissenting.

Commissioner Harkness stated that, even though it is a rollback, he felt that the saving in the millage rate compared to 2024 was miniscule. He stated that he had a lot of people wanting to know why the Commission agreed to pay over \$1 million to have everyone's properties reassessed, with most of them having their values significantly increased, if the whole point was to keep their taxes down? Mr. Sims informed him that it is a state requirement that the County reassess all the properties in the County every three years. If the County does not fall within the required sales ratio of 38.5% or better than the state will come in and reassess the properties. For many years, the assessments were not being done as proactively as they should have been.

Additionally, during this same time, property values skyrocketed. Habersham County was having its sales ratios coming back at closer to 35%, which is way below the minimum. For this reason, the Board of Commissioners approved the consultants to come in to assist in reevaluating the properties. These reassessments included industrial and commercial properties that had not been assessed properly as well. The intention was that the increase in revenue received from the reassessment of commercial and industrial property alone would help in paying for the cost of hiring the consultant for the reassessments. Though these reassessments did result in an increase to the digest for commercial and industrial properties, the Commission has not captured this extra revenue to pay for the reassessment because the Commission chose to roll back the millage rate the past two years.

Motion by Commissioner Akin, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, to approve the Habersham Countywide Hospital millage rate of 1.129 and Emergency Medical Services millage rate of 1.275. Motion carried 3-2 with Commissioner Tench and Commissioner Harkness dissenting.

Commissioner Woodall stated that the standard homeowner shouldn't see an increase in their property taxes between the millage rate rollbacks and receiving either the county's homestead exemption or the HB 581 exemption. Further, he added that the Tax Commissioner had sent letters out to everyone who would potentially have qualified for the local floating homestead exemption that freezes the taxable value of their property. Mr. Sims wished to add that there is a new chart that has been added to the County website called "How to Read Your Tax Assessment Notice" that he feels may be helpful to the public.

Commissioner Harkness stated that he knows for a fact that there are property owners whose taxes have doubled in the past four years, and that he is concerned about the elderly and disabled who live on fixed incomes.

Ms. Holden informed everyone that the hearing tonight was to set the County millage rates, and that a special called meeting of the Board of Commissioners has been scheduled for next Wednesday, August 27th at 6:00 p.m. to approve the 2025 Tax Year Levy Resolution once they receive the school systems approved millage rate.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Harkness, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the consent agenda with the amendments made during the adoption of the agenda.

- a. Consider/Approve Minutes of June 16, 2025 Executive Session
- b. Consider/Approve Minutes of July 21, 2025 Work Session
- c. Consider/Approve Minutes of July 21, 2025 Regular Meeting
- d. Consider/Approve Minutes of July 28, 2025 Special Called Meeting
- e. Consider/Approve Purchase of One (1) 2023 International HX620 Roll Off Truck for Landfill
- f. Consider/Approve Ratifying Agreement for Habersham County Emergency Services to Provide Clinical Experience Opportunities for Piedmont University School of Nursing Students
- g. Consider/Approve Authorizing Chairman to Sign Subdivision Participation Form and All Other Documents Necessary for Participation in the Purdue Settlement as Part of the National Prescription Opioid Litigation

- h. Consider/Approve Adoption of the Georgia Department of Transportation Procurement Policy as an Addendum to Habersham County's Current Transit Policy
- ~~i. Consider/Approve Temporary FY 2026 Sub Contractor Coordinated Transportation Services Agreement with Verida, Inc for Provision of Transportation Services to Eligible DHS Seniors. This item was removed during the adoption of the agenda.~~
- j. Consider/Approve Food Service Agreement and Addendum #1 with Trio Community Meals for Provision of Nutrition Services for Senior Center Clients
- k. Consider/Approve Contract with Yellowstone Landscaping for Right-of-Way Mowing and Trimming
- l. Consider/Approve Memorandum of Agreement with Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for Right-of-Way Expenses Associated with Replacement of Seventh St. Bridge Over the Norfolk Southern Railway
- m. Consider/Approve Facilities Use Agreement with Azteca Adult Soccer League for Field at Aquatic Center
- n. Consider/Approve Renewal of Contracted Instructor Agreement with Christine Tekippe for Provision of Aqua Aerobics Classes at Aquatic Center
- o. Consider/Approve Renewal of Agreement with Piedmont University for Usage of Ruby C. Fulbright Recreation and Aquatic Center Facilities by Students and Facility
- p. Consider/Approve Alcohol License Renewal/Application for:
 - 1. Glen Ella Springs, Located at 1789 Bear Gap Rd, Clarksville, GA for Wine and Beer Consumption on Premises

REPORTS:

- a. County Manager's Report: Tim Sims, County Manager
- b. Departmental Report: Kathy Holcomb, Senior Center Director

APPOINTMENTS:

Joint Development Authority *4-Year Term Expiring 6/30/2029*

- 1. Ty Akins (Term Expires 6/30/2025): At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to appoint Jim Butterworth to the Joint Development Authority to take over the seat left vacant by the expiration of Mr. Ty Akins' term.

- 2. Mike Beecham (Term Expires 6/30/2025): At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to table the appointment for this seat on the Joint Development Authority left vacant by the expiration of Mr. Mike Beecham's term.

Hospital Authority

3-Year Term Expiring 6/30/2028

1. Dr. Josh Garrett (Term Expires 6/30/2025): Commissioner Tench's Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Tench, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a slate consisting of the following three individuals for consideration by the Hospital Authority to fill the seat left vacant by Dr. Josh Garrett's term expiration:

Dr. Josh Garrett
Lock Arnold
Tim Jarrells

Library Board

3-Year Term Expiring 6/30/2028

1. Gisela McGugan (Term Expires 6/30/2025): Commissioner Harkness' Appointment

There were no applicants for the Library Board at this time and Ms. McGugan is not seeking reappointment.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to table this appointment for a seat on the Library Board left vacant by Gisela McGugan's term expiration.

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

1-Year Term Expiring 6/30/2026

1. Ken Schubring (Term Expires 6/30/2025): At-Large Appointment

Motion by Commissioner Akins, seconded by Commissioner Woodall, and voted unanimously (5-0) to select Lawrence Bridges as the Board of Commissioners choice for the private sector appointment to the GMRC.

DBHDD Region 1 Advisory Council

3- Year Term Ending 11/30/2027

1. Jeremy Noles (Resignation- Term Expires 11/30/2027) At-Large Appointment

Mr. Jeremy Noles submitted his resignation for the DBHDD Region 1 Advisory Council on June 16, 2025. The position had been advertised; however no applications have been received.

Motion by Commissioner Mealor, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to table the appointment for this seat on the DBHDD Region 1 Advisory Council left vacant by Mr. Jeremy Noles resignation.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Consider/Approve 5-Year Lease-Purchase Agreement to Purchase Patrol Vehicles for Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Robin Krockum addressed the Commission. In the past the Sheriff's Office has been approved for around \$420,000 each year under capital improvements to purchase patrol vehicles. This has essentially equated to about six patrol vehicles per year. These vehicles are assigned to the patrol division, who put approximately 30,000 miles per year on their vehicles and then the old vehicles are rotated down through the agency for use in other departments within the Sheriff's Office. Replacing only six vehicles per year has caused a problem with the fleet aging faster than vehicles being replaced. The Sheriff's Office now has 26 vehicles that have over 150,000 miles on them, with 11 of these vehicles having over 200,000 miles on them. This has led to an increase in mechanical issues with the vehicles and maintenance costs. Sheriff Krockum is requesting that he be allowed to enter into a 5-year lease purchase agreement that would allow him to purchase 30 new vehicles at one time. This would essentially be using the same amount of funds that would have been budgeted over the five-year period but allow him to update the entire fleet to get it back on track with the County fleet policy. The County would own the 30 new vehicles at the end of the five-year lease period. Any lower mileage vehicles they currently have would be rotated down to other Departments, and they would free up around 30 or more high mileage vehicles to be auctioned off by the County. The money from auctioning the surplus vehicles can be put into a contingency fund to assist with any maintenance needs the new vehicles may have. Regarding the financing, Sheriff Krockum informed the Commission that they had put out a bid for financing for the vehicles not to exceed the 5-year CIP funding of \$2,100,000 or a 5-year period. They requested that the payments be made annually to be made on or after January 01, 2026. They received a total of six bids with five having come from within the County. The lowest bidder was South State Bank with an interest rate of 3.49% with annual payments starting September 1, 2026 and a total of \$1,988,460. They requested bids for vehicle pricing for their current patrol vehicles, Ford Explorer EcoBoosts, and the lowest pricing they received from dealers who had vehicles currently in stock was from Brannen Motor Company at \$47,562 per vehicle, shipped to location. This is through the GA Department of Administrative Services State Contract. They requested bids for the equipment installation and the lowest pricing that they received was \$12,900 per vehicle from Fastner Products in Habersham County. The vehicle decals will cost \$425 per vehicle with Helton Graphics.

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Harkness, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the purchase of patrol vehicles for the Sheriff's Office and authorize the Chairman to sign the any documents related to this purchase.

- b. Consider/Approve Change Order #3 to Pittman Construction Company's 2025 LMIG Contract

Public Works Director Jerry Baggett addressed the Commission along with Financial Administrator Kiani Holden. The County had received a Transit Grant for \$69,039 for capital improvement projects that they intended to use to pave the Facilities Maintenance entrance and parking area, the north end of the Ruby C. Fulbright Aquatic Center, and the Public Works parking area east of the fueling station. The Transit GDOT Grant Funding must be used by November 30, 2025 or the County will lose the funds. The plans were for the Road Department to do this work in-house and funds were set aside for these projects in the previous fiscal year budget, however they were unable to be completed due to staffing challenges. After a thorough analysis by Road Department staff, it was determined that the cost of performing these projects in-house would have been \$141,815. Pittman Construction has said that they can complete these projects for \$93,191.40 if they are added to the current contract the County has with them for the 2025 LMIG, which would save the County approximately \$48,600 as well as allowing the projects to be completed in time to utilize the transit grant funding. County Manager Sims stressed to the Commission that no LMIG funds were being utilized for these projects, the change order is just adding this additional scope of work to the existing contract with Pittman Construction.

Motion by Commissioner Harkness, seconded by Commissioner Mealor, and voted unanimously (5-0) to approve change order #4 to Pittman Construction Company's 2025 LMIG Contract.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Woodall congratulated the Habersham County Raiders for their win and went on to say how he felt that it was great to see the community come together for their students.

Commissioner Harkness and Commissioner Tench thanked everyone who attended the meeting.

Commissioner Akins and Commissioner Mealor had no additional comments.

~~**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** Litigation, pursuant to O.C.G.A. §50-14-2 The executive session was removed from the agenda during its adoption.~~

ADJOURN

Motion by Commissioner Woodall, seconded by Commissioner Akins, and voted unanimously (5-0) to adjourn the meeting at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____
Jimmy Tench, Commission Chairman

Attest: _____
Brandalin Carnes, County Clerk