

Walker County Governmental Authority
101 South Duke Street, P.O. Box 445
LaFayette, GA 30728

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of
Commissioners

March 6, 2025 - 6:00 PM

I. Call to Order:

Chairwoman Angie Teems called to order the Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners held at Courthouse Annex III, 201 S. Main Street, LaFayette, Georgia at 6:00 PM on March 6, 2025.

II. Attendees:

The following were present: Chairwoman Teems, Commissioner Robert Blakemore, Commissioner Mark Askew, Commissioner Brian Hart, Commissioner Gene Wilson, County Clerk Lisa Richardson, Chief Financial Officer Angela Buettnner, Communications & Community Development Director Joe Legge, Compliance Officer Aleks Jagiella-Litts, Human Resources Director Hugh Delacruz, Planning and Zoning Director Jon Pursley, Director of Solid Waste and Environmental Management Paine Gily, Walker County Coroner Billy Sims, and Captain Chris Anderson from the Walker County Sheriff's Office. Other guests signed in at the meeting as well. Please see the attached sign in sheet.

III. Approval of Minutes:

Commissioner Hart made a motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Scheduled Meeting held on February 6, 2025 at 6:00pm. Seconded by Commissioner Blakemore. 4 ayes and 0 nays, motion carried. Minutes approved.

IV. Chairwoman's Report:

In her first 60 days in office, Chairwoman Teems said she had found one-million dollars in savings, revenue, productivity and unnecessary expenses. She eliminated several revolving expenses, such as a monthly \$4,000 invoice from a lobbying service that went unused since 2022. This was a reduction of \$123,000.00 annually. She's creating an accurate list of County equipment, vehicles and properties that will result in a reduction in insurance premiums. Removing 17 vehicles that are no longer in service equals a savings of \$75,000.00. Chairwoman Teems plans to increase revenue on properties that State entities contract for use generating \$100,000.00 annually to the budget. The County is also renegotiating higher interest rates on savings with our financial institutions, positively impacting the bottom line.

Litter and speeding is bad in our entire County. There are 674 miles of roads in the County and there have been no mandates or budget for litter control. Chairwoman Teems and Commissioner Askew are gathering information and working on several ideas and concepts on litter control. Commissioner Askew advised the County is exploring use of a sub-contracting, but they require better numbers on what it's going to take to get it under control. Chairwoman Teems advised lack of labor and using a sub-contractor with bids will take some time. A task force for litter control will be established and will meet in

the Commissioners office on March 17th at 5:30pm. A new fine will be initiated on April 7th for no tarp over garbage being brought to the landfill.

Addressing the speeding issues in the County, the Chairwoman commented that the County does not have jurisdiction on city roads. They have increased signage and are considering other ideas to implement on County roads. With the citizens rejecting additional funding and increasing the employee base, the Sheriff's department is doing the best they can with the manpower they have.

There is a misconception on the investment in vehicles last month. The vehicle cost announced totaled \$300,000.00 and the Board collectively spent \$500,000.00 on equipment, including those vehicles. There is still a balance of \$100,000.00 in the SPLOST vehicle fund. The SPLOST document provided to the public at the meeting explained the use of SPLOST funding. This County is using fiscally responsible strategies using SPLOST funds and directives put in place in 2020 & 2021. The County will be selling surplus vehicles and equipment in an upcoming surplus sale to bring money back to the bottom line.

The Chair addressed the salary increases to current staff in her first month in office and emphasized the importance of competitive salaries to retain and attract top talent. Department of Labor regulations concerning the restructuring of job descriptions may involve a salary increase or decrease depending on the jobs that are assigned. The Chair stated several sources were utilized to justify the increases such as: Indeed, GovernmentJobs.com, and Zip Recruiter. Before proceeding with changes, CFO Angela Buettner confirmed the funds were available and in the budget for the salary increases.

Hugh Delacruz, Director of Human Resources, developed a salary structure based on compensation across north Georgia only. The majority of the salaries were below or equal to comparable positions. The compensation packets from Dade, Catoosa, Chattooga and Whitfield Counties were used as comparisons. The County's retention rate is low, as roles have not been paid what they are worth, causing issues with manpower and bringing in new talent.

Chairwoman Teems concluded her report by stating she remains committed to ensuring the continued success of the County workforce and welcomes any further discussion on this matter.

V. Reports:

Compliance Officer Aleks Jagiella-Litts spoke on the Pension Plan for Walker County Government and referred to the summary of recommended amendments to the plan from the Ferenczy Benefits Law Center packet that is included in the agenda packet.

VI. Public Comment:

1. Dr. Donald White, representing the Oak Hill School Alumni, made a request for additional space at the city recreation center to establish a memorial for past alumni. This memorial would feature artifacts, trophies, pictures, and other items from the school, as well as personal items from alumni from the 1960s. Dr. White emphasized the importance of preserving the history of Oak Hill School and honoring the contributions of its alumni. Dr. White expressed his desire for people to remember the past and appreciate the future and believes that this memorial would serve as a valuable resource for the community, allowing current and future generations to learn about the school's legacy and the accomplishments of its graduates.
2. Jim Pope inquired whether Shannon Whitfield left a zero-balance debt for the County when he left office. The Commission acknowledged Mr. Pope's question and confirmed a zero debt balance at the end of Mr. Whitfield's term. Mr. Pope also addressed the

Commission asking if this term would leave a zero balance. Chairwoman Teems confirmed there was no reason for long term debt.

3. Ted Nedham addressed the Commission about the proposed limestone quarry. Nedham said the locals were assured by Mr. Cross that mining would not affect water quality and would not be mined below the water table. He said two independent geological studies confirmed the quarry would be mining 75-feet below the water table. Nedham spoke with the EPD and they advised that the mining quarry's owners stated the project would not be economically viable if they did not mine below the water table. Petrolonics Solutions shows the quarry is on a critical groundwater recharge zone that directly overlaps the outer Management zone of municipal water wells. Nedham invites everyone to review reports and advocate to the EPD to deny any permit for the mining below the table water.
4. Dan Waters lives in Blue Mountain Air Park and is concerned with the impact of the rock quarry on the beautiful landscape. Waters said he understands it is in the EPD's hands at this time but wants Walker County to be aware of all the impact on the community. Chairwoman Teems inquired what water authority serves his area. Waters said he is on Lafayette Water and Nedham is with the Chattooga County Water Authority.
5. Alan Durden stated his concern with individuals in his area on Hwy 337 that seemingly had no reason to be in the area. The individuals were non English speaking and they would not identify why they were in the area. He saw no vehicle with the individuals and they did not have garbage bags for litter pickup. Durden called the Sheriff's non-emergency number and claimed no one would answer. It was routed to 911 and they advised they would send a deputy to check it out. Durden said he never saw the Deputy, so he started calling multiple County phone numbers and was disappointed he couldn't speak with someone in an official capacity over his concern. Chairwoman Teems inquired what phone number he called and stated she was very concerned over the issue and getting assistance. Commissioner Askew asked where his residence is on Hwy 337. Commissioner Wilson asked what date this incident occurred. Durden advised it was on March 6th at approximately 9.00am. Durden called 706-638-1909 and then called the Commissioners Office. Chairwoman Teems requested his direct number so she could reach out and follow up with him.
6. Robert Tate spoke to Durden's concern and advised that Hwy 337 is a State Highway and contracted through the State for litter control. Individuals are dropped off by vehicle and they are picked up at a later time. You will see a vehicle with a trailer containing the garbage in another area as they drop off multiple crews for litter pick up.

Mr. Tate asked what impact the two-million dollar sewage lawsuit found in favor of Chattanooga would have on County taxpayers. Chairwoman Teems advised the total was \$1.8 million and was paid the prior week by the Walker County Water & Sewerage Authority, which is independent of Walker County Government. Tate asked what measures they were taking to treat water locally to make it safe. Chairwoman Teems advised. Multiple comments from other Commissioners were made addressing this issue.

7. Ned Yates highlighted his concerns regarding the elections and the Board's stance on accountability, transparency, and truth. Yates emphasized the need for proper fleet management in the county, citing the lack of visibility into vehicle usage. Yates requested validation on repair costs versus replacing a vehicle and expressed his desire for a County program that clearly outlines actions and justifications for incurred costs.

Mr. Yates also raised concerns about SPLOST and the proper management of funds and emphasized the need for transparency and accountability in the allocation of SPLOST funds, ensuring that they are utilized effectively for the benefit of the community. Yates urged the Board of Commissioners to provide regular updates and detailed reports on SPLOST expenditures, allowing citizens to track and monitor how their tax dollars are being invested.

8. Tina Groce advised that Google shows 706-375-7810 as the non-emergency line for the Walker County Sheriff's Office. When you call this number, it rings into the 911 center, where they will assist you with your non-emergency call. Groce expressed appreciation for the current Chairwoman and Commissioners and their goal of being completely transparent about fund usage.

The Vietnam Wall event held at the Rossville gymnasium was a huge success with over 300 people attending. The event was supported by many elected officials and hosted by the Rossville gymnasium, which impressed the speaker with its recent updates. Additionally, the Desert Storm recognition dinner was attended by the Lafayette Jr. ROTC, American Legion, and several elected officials in support of our veterans.

A community litter pick-up day is planned for Saturday, March 22nd at 9:00 am in Rock Spring, at the Fieldstone Village, organized by Operation Outreach. The plan includes dividing the county into litter areas for litter pickup.

9. Randy Pittman, representing the Walker County Historic Preservation Commission, expressed his gratitude to the commission for their support of the Vietnam Wall and Operation Outreach. He highlighted the positive feedback received from the community regarding the information posted on Facebook about the event.

Pittman discussed his work with the Oak Hill School, where he is focused on stabilizing the school and stated that he has received \$250 toward the project, but the engineering phase will require over \$15,300.00.

Pittman informed the group that a regional survey is being conducted in the Armuchee Valley. People wearing vests with a logo will be in the area and they are authorized to conduct the survey.

VII. Old Business:

Purchase Order 2025-00000923 to Estes Equipment Company for a Fuel System Upgrade for the County Public Works Department (funding from 2020 SPLOST) Tabled at February 6, 2025 meeting.

1. Commissioner Hart stated his willingness to table this item until the April 6th meeting to give everyone time to review a secondary bid from 1st Choice Services. In speaking with Rick Carr, he has confirmed the current system is currently in working order.
 - a. Commissioner Hart made a motion to table until the April 6th, 2025 meeting.
 - b. Commissioner Askew seconded
 - c. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion to Table was approved.

VIII. New Business:

1. Resolution R-019-25 to Approve a List of Roads for Resurfacing in 2025-2026.
 - a. Commissioner Hart commented this would be summer of 2025 - 2026.
 - b. Chairwoman Teems stated 51 miles of roads were paved in 2024. SPLOST funds for roads have been exhausted. Going forward we only have T-SPLOST and LMIG funds to utilize for roads. We receive about \$6.75 Million annually from T-SPLOST. To stretch those funds, we are looking at a two-year paving list that would target 70-miles in unincorporated Walker County. The larger mileage number will lead to more competitive bids from contractors and the County would be locking in current rates vs higher rates in the future.
 - c. Commissioner Hart questioned if Public Works Director Carlen Bowers was working on bid packages.

- d. Chairwoman Teems confirmed Bowers is preparing bid packages but not in attendance due to Federal Jury Duty.
- e. Commissioner Askew wanted to inform the public that some roads were dictated due to the rerouting of the sewage project previously mentioned.
- f. Commissioner Wilson wanted to verify that once the bid packets go out, the contractors will get 30 days to review and then the final contracts will be presented to the Board for approval.
- g. Commissioner Hart made a motion to approve.
- h. Commissioner Wilson seconded.
- i. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

2. Resolution R-020-25 to Appoint a Member of the Alcoholic Beverage Committee.

- a. Chairwoman Teems would like to appoint Joanne Leach of Rossville to the committee.
- b. Commissioner Blakemore made a motion to approve.
- c. Commissioner Askew seconded.
- d. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

3. Resolution R-021-25 to Accept Roads in the Hawk's Ridge Subdivision for County Maintenance.

- a. Commissioner Hart spoke with Director Bowers and his recommendation was to accept
- b.. Motion from Commissioner Blakemore to approve.
- c. Seconded by Commissioner Askew.
- d. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

4. Resolution R-020-25 to Appoint a Member of the Alcoholic Beverage Committee.

- a. Chairwoman Teems would like to appoint Joanne Leach of Rossville to the committee.
- b. Commissioner Blakemore made a motion to approve.
- c. Commissioner Askew seconded.
- d. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

5. Purchase Order 2025-00001115 for \$293,326.00 to Jenkins Chrysler Dodge Jeep Inc. for seven Dodge Durango Pursuit vehicles for the Walker County Sheriff's Office (funding from 2020 SPLOST).

- a. Captain Anderson addressed the purchase order stating that SPLOST allocates funds for vehicles for the department. Jenkins Dodge priced matched another bid saving \$15,000.00 to the County. His department loses vehicles every year to attrition and are driving vehicles with over 200,000 miles which make them unsafe. Vehicles are down and in repair shops and unserviceable making the department short on patrol units. New vehicles need to be added to the fleet yearly.
- b. Chairwoman Teems added that the Sheriff's SPLOST is not the same as the County SPLOST. When SPLOST was set up, the administration designated 22 different categories to pull from and funds must be utilized from their category for expenditures. Each area has their own program ie: Landfill, Courthouse, Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, etc.
- c. Commissioner Hart asked to verify this amount was allocated from the SPLOST vehicle account.
- d. Commissioner Wilson asked if this will exhaust the monies in the Sheriff's office SPLOST vehicle account.
- e. Captain Anderson confirmed that there were funds available for next year and that would be the finalization of the SPLOST funds.
- f. Motion from Commissioner Hart to approve.
- g. Seconded by Commissioner Wilson.
- h. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

6. Purchase Order 2025-00001116 for \$31,000.00 to Paul Thigpen Chevrolet GMC for a 2021 Dodge Ram for the Walker County Sheriff's Office (funding from 2020 SPLOST).

- a. Captain Anderson stated this vehicle is going to the detective division for crime scene investigation. It has very low mileage and saves almost \$20,000.00 for purchasing used.
- b. Motion from Commissioner Blakemore to approve.
- c. Seconded by Commissioner Askew.
- d. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Motion was approved.

IX. Commissioner Comments:

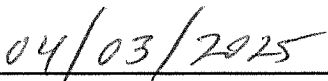
1. Commissioner Blakemore thanked everyone for coming out and noted that they are a legislative body, not full-time commissioners. District Commissioners have regular full time jobs.
2. Commissioner Askew thanked everyone for coming out and participating. Comments are heard and appreciated. Askew challenged everyone to show up and participate as a team to clean up the litter in the County. Commissioners also cannot know of everyone walking up and down the streets and be aware of why they are there. Commissioner Askew thanked everyone for attending.
3. Commissioner Hart thanked the American Legion Post 339 for doing a great job and putting on a great event with the Lafayette Jr. High ROTC. Mr. Hart appreciated the Post and the high school for putting the event on. Commissioner Hart stated that Mr. O'Neal spoke to us a month ago concerning property taxes and wanted to clarify that last year under Commissioner Whitfield the property taxes went up 0.4% per year, on average. The County is striving to do that again as a governing body. Those are true numbers off the State digest.
 - a. Chairwoman Teems commented that she also contacted Mr. O'Neal over the phone to discuss the issues he brought up at the February meeting.
4. Commissioner Wilson appreciates all the first responders and all the County employees working hard every day. His number is on the website and if you are in his district please feel free to reach out to him with any issues or questions.

X. Adjournment:

With no further business on the agenda, Chairwoman Teems adjourned the meeting at 7:27 P.M.



Angela Teems
Chairwoman/CEO
Walker County Georgia



Date

Minutes prepared by: Walker County County Clerk, Lisa Richardson