

**MINUTES
WORK SESSION
WARE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2024
3:30 p.m.**

The Ware County Board of Commissioners held a Work Session, Monday, December 9, 2024 at 3:30 p.m. in the Ware County Commission Chambers, 305 Oak Street, Suite 201, Waycross, Georgia 31501 with Chairman Elmer Thrift presiding.

CALL TO ORDER	Chairman Elmer Thrift
COMMISSIONERS PRESENT	Commissioner Leonard Burse, Commissioner Jerry Pope, and Commissioner Timmy Lucas
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT	Commissioner Sammy Hendricks
STAFF PRESENT	Interim County Manager Melinda Brooks; Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog; Deputy County Clerk Melissa Bennett
PRESS	Danny Bartlett, WJH
INVOCATION	The Invocation was given by Commissioner Burse
PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Elmer Thrift

GUEST SPEAKER(S):

- **Carlos Nelson, Ware County Elections Supervisor**
Mr. Nelson gave a recap of the current election. All election workers, staff and board members excelled with the election. Due to the recent flooding Waycross received, rainwater came into the building. The flooding came at a time when staff was still present so they were able to move the election equipment before it got wet. Commissioner Burse and Commissioner Lucas commended the election staff on the work they did during the election.
- **Tax Commissioner Roger Collins and Chief Appraiser Billy Carter**
HB 581 update
Mr. Collins told the Commission that House Bill 581 deals with homesteaded property and will limit how much the assessed values can increase. He said the problem that Ware County is facing is that Ware County's homestead exemption is better than the one offered in HB 581. He stated that all three entities (City, County, and BOE) have to agree to opt out. The requirements for opting out are that each entity must hold three public hearings on three different days and advertise in the legal organ. Mr. Collins explained other parameters that are outlined in House Bill

581. He said all counties have until March 1st to opt out of the bill. He strongly encouraged Ware County to opt out because of the existing freezes already in place.

HB 311

Mr. Collins asked the Commission if there has been a decision made on House Bill 311.

AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Resolution 2024-34: Delegating Authority to the Tax Commissioner to Waive Penalties and Interest

Tax Commissioner Roger Collins explained that this resolution delegates the authority to him to allow him to waive certain penalties and interest on taxes. This resolution is approved every four years when he begins a new term. This delegation of authority is based on O.C.G.A. 48-5-242 and will be effective January 1, 2025.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

B. Resolution 2024-35: Authority for Tax Commissioner to Accept Payments of Taxes

Tax Commissioner Roger Collins explained that this resolution authorizes him to accept payment of taxes in any form (check, card, etc.) instead of cash only. The legal tender in Georgia is cash and gold bullion. This authority has to be renewed every term. This will be effective January 1, 2025.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

C. Appointment – Waycross/Ware County Land Bank Authority

Interim County Manager Brooks stated this Resolution is to appoint someone to the Waycross/Ware County Land Bank Authority. The candidate must live in Ware County. Mr. Carlos Nelson currently holds Post 7 and his term will expire on December 31, 2024. He cannot serve again as he has completed a full four-year term.

Commissioner Burse recommended William Simmons, who has already served on the Waycross/Ware County Planning Commission and he would be happy to serve on the Waycross/Ware County Land Bank Authority.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

D. Alcohol License Application

Planning and Codes Director James Shubert explained the alcohol license application for Huey's Country Store, located at 7471 Albany Hwy, Millwood, GA. Tejasben Patel, owner of Huey's Country Store would like to obtain a license to sell beer and wine for consumption off-premises. This location meets all of the requirements of the Ware County Alcohol License regulations. Ms. Patel does not have any disqualifiers that would prevent her from obtaining an alcohol license.

Commissioner Lucas asked Director Shubert how far the store is located from the church. Director Shubert responded that the distance is over 300 feet from the church.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

E. Alcohol License Application

Planning and Codes Director James Shubert explained the alcohol license application for Cocktail Caravan, LLC, 4131 Knight Ave, Waycross. Harlee Harris and Sara Hickox have a mobile business for catering at venues and would like to obtain a license to sell by the drink: beer, wine, and liquor. This mobile business meets all of the requirements of the Ware County Alcohol License regulations.

Ms. Harris and Ms. Hickox do not have any disqualifiers that would prevent them from obtaining an alcohol license. However, Ware County Ordinance doesn't have a lot of requirements, but there are requirements listed in the State of Georgia Code 560-2-13. According to the State of Georgia, Alcoholic Beverage Catering requires permits for every event they cater; a permit from Ware County and the State of Georgia. The permit covers the transport of the packages. Broken packages (once seals are broken) cannot be transported; they must be left at the event. This is the first application of this kind in Ware County.

Commissioner Burse asked Director Shubert if he had spoken with other counties that have authorized this type of license. Director Shubert stated he would contact Lowndes County. Commissioner Pope asked if this license could be used within the City of Waycross. Director Shubert advised that the owners would also have to apply for a license with the City of Waycross. The Commissioners advised that they would like to table the application until they can get more information. (This would be a license for mobile bartending.)

Not Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

F. DWDA SPLOST Disbursement – Intergovernmental Agreement

This item is an Intergovernmental Agreement between Downtown Waycross Development Authority (DWDA) and Ware County for the use and distribution of proceeds from the November 8, 2022 SPLOST.

Commissioner Pope, the ex-officio member on the DWDA Board of Directors, explained that the DWDA was budgeted \$250,000 on the 2022 SPLOST referendum. The referendum requires that both the DWDA and WWDA come to the Commission to get approval for projects and payment. The DWDA came up with an agreement which would allow the DWDA to submit an application for payment directly to the Commission Office instead of coming before the Commission each time. The attached exhibit lists the projects and estimated costs of each one. Commissioner Pope introduced DWDA Director Laura Dixon, Board Chairman Katherine Taylor, and board member Jack Lott. Mrs. Taylor told the Commission how the caboose was saved from being scrapped and put at the Depot. She explained they want to put interactive kiosks in the caboose and Depot for the schools and day cares to use when they come on field trips. The kiosks explain the importance of the caboose and the history of the railroad. There will be an adult-oriented kiosk which will also feature some downtown spots and other tourist areas.

DWDA Director Dixon told the Commission about the Rail Fan camera system that is installed on the back side of the Depot. It is a 24/7 live feed on YouTube that allows people all over the world to watch the trains going in and out of the Rice Yard. People in

the UK and Africa are watching online. She said now that the DWDA offices are back at the Depot, she has been able to meet the tourists who come to just sit and watch the trains. Some of them have come from Nova Scotia, Switzerland, Canada, and other places.

Jack Lott told the Commission that the DWDA moved into the Depot 24 years ago after it was restored with TSPLOST money. He noted that if that huge project had not been done, a big part of the community's history would have been lost. He noted there are some issues due to the age of the building. The bricks and mortar need to be sealed as they are allowing moisture to get inside and messing up the sheetrock and wood. Preserving the Depot was money well spent, and they would like to keep it in good repair.

The Commission and the DWDA representatives discussed other buildings downtown that they would like to save. They also discussed a mobile mural that CSX has permitted them to put at the intersection of Mary Street, Alice Street, and Plant Avenue where the crossing is blocked.

Chairman Thrift asked Accounting Supervisor Beverly York when the SPLOST money would be available to DWDA once the overpass funds have been collected. Mrs. York noted the funds are available now. She noted in the past, the DWDA had to pay for their projects upfront, and the County would reimburse within 10 days. Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Herzog explained that originally SPLOST required that DWDA to come before the Commission for approval of any projects. She explained, with this agreement and attached exhibit, they are requesting preapproval so they don't have to come back for each one. They will just submit an application for payment, and the County will render payment within ten (10) days.

Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

G. Discussion of 2025 LMIG Application – Select New Roads for Resurfacing

Interim County Manager Brooks explained to the Commission that they need to come up with a list of roads for resurfacing for the 2025 LMIG application. The amount of LMIG funds will be around \$1.219 million.

Not Added to Regular Meeting Agenda

MANAGER COMMENTS:

Interim County Manager Brooks gave an update on the Debris pickup. Crowder Gulf is now doing a last sweep around the county and plans to have all debris collection completed by December 21st. They are in the process of cleaning two of their sites but will leave one running. They will shut down so their employees can go back to their home states to spend time with their families during the Christmas holidays. According to EMA Director Jonathan Daniell, FEMA will be reimbursing 100% of the costs.

WWDA Director Jason Rubenbauer gave an update on the 2025 Eggs and Issues. Local legislators will meet with the Ware, Pierce, and Coffee County attendees on Monday evening, January 13, 2025 in Atlanta. The Chambers Eggs and Issues event will be the following morning.

Interim County Manager Brooks reminded the Commission that their regular meeting on Monday, January 13, 2025 has been rescheduled for Thursday, January 16, 2025 due to the conflict with the Eggs and Issues in Atlanta. Staff and Commissioners will be attending this event.

COMMISSION COMMENTS:

Commissioner Pope asked the Interim County Manager about a letter and any updates from GDOT about a bridge replacement on Jamestown Road/US 1 and also putting a round-about at forks.

Commissioner Burse commended the Interim County Manager and Deputy County Clerk on the work they have been doing.

ADJOURN:

Commissioner Lucas made a motion to adjourn the Work Session. Commissioner Pope seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The Work Session adjourned at 4:53 p.m.

Date proposed to be approved: July 14, 2025


Elmer Thrift, Chairman


Melissa Bennett, Deputy County Clerk

7/16/2025
Date

